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THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

OCTOBER
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2—The competitor's name and address must be written at the top of the first page of the letter.
3—The letter must be mailed in a sealed, stamped envelope. *No post cards will be considered.*
4—There shall be no limits to the length a letter may be; and any competitor may send in as many letters as desired.
5—This Contest shall be freely open to anyone, anywhere.
6—The first prize will be awarded to the contestant whose letter on the subject, "Nothing Takes the Place of Leather," is the best in the opinion of the judges.
7—The Contest opens officially June 30, 1923, and closes October 31, 1923.
8—In case of tie, both or all tying contestants will receive the full amount of the prize tied for.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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One New Serial, Three Complete Novelettes

HE BELONGED to the first American division to land in France, the first to take a hostile gun, the first to do anything more than learn to throw hand-grenades and kill bundles of branches. For one reason he was glad to be wounded; for another reason he was gladder still to get back to the front. Maybe he can get a laugh now out of his experiences; but he couldn't then. "PILGRIM'S PROGRESS," a novelette of the Great War, complete in the next issue.

THIRSTING for vengeance on *Olvir Rosta*, *Swain* left his Orkney steading for Scotland where their longships met in furious battle. "SWAIN'S SONS," a complete novelette of viking against viking, by Arthur D. Howden Smith in the next issue.

A LOT of things happened the day before the *Medea* sailed. They happened to *"Black John" Dorrock*, the skipper; to *Mr. Lappett*, the mate; to Irish *Jimmy Kerrill*, the second; and even to *Grinton*, the owner; so that when the old hooker put out to sea, with her drunken crew tumbling over the side, she had a cargo aboard her that was not all stowed away in the hold, and that promised more and rarer excitement than all the winds of the Western Ocean were likely to bring. "THE TRAMP," by W. Townend, is a three-part story beginning in our next issue.

"I TELL you, *señores*, that any expedition that ever tries to force its way to the lair of *Black White* had best make its peace with God before it starts. But—and this I want to know—what was in the mind of that half-mad *Black White* that drove him to help me fight my foes?" "THE THIRTY GANG," by Arthur O. Friel, a complete novelette in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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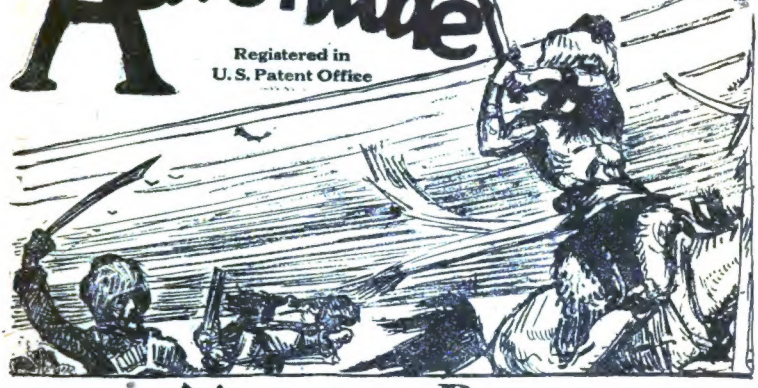

Men from Below

a complete novelette by Harold Lamb

Author of "The King Dies," "The Baiting of the Warriors," etc.

THE *koshevoi*, the chief of all the Cossacks, was troubled. Even though it was a fair, bright day in Autumn of that eventful year 1611, his spirit was heavy within him. He sat in the threshold of his hut in the Siech—the war-encampment of the Cossacks on the river Dnieper—and moodily applied cobwebs to a half-healed gash in his shoulder.

The muscles of his arm were lean, his drooping mustache that hung to his bare chest, was gray. Old was the *koshevoi*. His one good eye gleamed, as if it beheld not the log barracks and dusty figures of the camp, but the tossing deck of a war-galley.

In fact the eye of the *koshevoi* saw not the brown grass of the steppe, but the waste of the Black Sea, the gleaming palaces of the sultan. Aye, the *koshevoi* was old, and the old have their dreams.

His hand closed around the goblet at his knee, and he tossed off the brandy and gunpowder, mixed as a remedy for his wound. In all his days he had known no day like this.

In the Siech there was not powder enough to fill a pair of riding-boots. That was his trouble. He was chief of the Cossacks from the Urals to Poland, keeper of the frontier, along the River Dnieper.

Yet the Cossacks had no more powder than would suffice for a single discharge of their carriage-guns, firelocks and handguns.

If the sultan should come to know this, the Moslems would rejoice in their hearts. They would carry fire and devastation across the border. Already they held the shores of the Black Sea, and the saltpeter-fields necessary for the making of powder. The tide of white-capped janisseries was rising toward the cities of Europe, upon which the Grand Siegnieur was looking with covetous eyes.

Why not? When Dutch and English emissaries at the court of the Grand Turk gave him placating gifts of money and arms, seasoned with apologies? And why not, when up behind the frontier the Poles made war on the Muscovites, and the Muscovites made war on each other, *boyar* fighting

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peasant; when Boris Goudunov, who had been tsar in the *koshevoi's* best days, was dead, and the nobles were clawing the flesh from the bones of the serfs? The whole Christian world, as far as the chief of the Cossacks recked of it, was burning up powder and shouting for more.

So it happened that not a grain of it was to be had down below, on the frontier. Even the Jews would not sell it on the steppe because they could not get it.

Two months ago the Cossack commander had bought a shipload of powder from a merchant in Kief, and paid for it out of the treasury of the Siech. It had been loaded on a bark and sent down the Dnieper. River-pirates had boarded the bark and gutted it.

Word of the loss of this shipment had just come in, and the *koshevoi* pondered the matter grimly. More than anything else in the world, he wanted that powder. The first thing he did was to send out detachments of young warriors to the steppe where outposts of the Turks could see them. He had ordered the Cossacks to shoot off their firelocks at flying geese, at marks on the prairie, into the air—to waste powder as if it were of no value to them.

But he could not throw dust in the eyes of the Turks much longer. The score to be settled between them was too heavy. Especially now, when the Cossacks stood alone on the Christian side of the frontier, the Moslems would strike them as a hawk pounces upon a pigeon.

The *koshevoi* pulled a scarlet *svitza* over his bare shoulders and rose, stepping from his hut.

ON THE hard-packed clay between the barracks the warriors of the Siech diced and drank, and smoked and slept. Long-limbed and sun-scorched they were, armed for the most part with Turkish simitars, and Damascus maces, spoil taken from the Moslems. The commander noticed that they had discarded the pistols from their belts and not an arquebus was to be seen.

His men did not worry over the lack of powder as long as they had steel ready to hand. But the *koshevoi* knew that if they went up against the firelocks of the sultan's infantry with swords, they would be food for the kites, and the jackals would fatten from their bodies. What then of Cossack glory? What of the Cossack souls, his children?

They were licking their wounds after the last battle, and the high boots of soft leather were stained and ripped, and the long coats bore dark-brown spots. A colonel who had lost an arm was dancing the *hopak* and *trepak* to the sound of the guitars, to show how little he esteemed his hurts.

They were men who had left families and villages to join the Siech, wanderers and masterless men from all the corners of the great steppe. Entering the Siech, they thought no more of women, and even dropped their names for the nicknames given by their *kunaks*, their comrades. Except that each Cossack looked forward to the inevitable rendezvous with that dark mistress of theirs whose name was Death.

The eye of the *koshevoi* ran over the groups of the various regiments. He could not spare a regiment to comb the upper river for his powder——

A shout of laughter went up from several who had been listening to the tales of a stout warrior seated on an empty wine-keg.

"The forehead* to you, Ayub! With the forehead, I say! Prince of liars and father of falsehoods!"

Ayub stood up, a full six foot six, and two hundred and fifty pounds in his boots; yet the gold armlet on his biceps pressed hard sinew, and his broad, good-natured face was muscular. He had been into and out of more scrapes than the *koshevoi* himself, and was a general favorite. It was said in the camp that Ayub would never be killed, because the good Saint Peter would then be

*The Moslem salaam brought the hands to the forehead.

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obliged to tear down the golden gates to pass his bulky body through.

"On your faces, dog brothers," he grinned. "You are looking at a man. I tell you such deeds are a small matter in my life. Ekh! When I was born my mother salted me down. As I live, sir brothers, it was so. How many of you have smoked your Cossack pipes in the mosques across the Black Sea? Not many. The minstrels of the steppe say that after my raids on the palace of the Grand Siegnieur at *Bagche Serai* (Pigs' Camp) the women of the sultan's seraglio looked at me twice, I assure you. But as to that——"

A roar of laughter interrupted him.

"The colonels say we lack powder," cried a warrior, waving the tarred stump of an arm, "very well. We can grind Ayub up between the millstones. We will have sulfur and brimstone enough out of him to supply all the Siech with powder."

"To the —— with sulfur and brimstone," retorted Ayub. "The *koshevoi* will get us powder in time."

Hearing this, the commander stared at the big warrior reflectively.

"Ayub!" His voice carried across the square, and silence fell on the noisy groups. "Where is your comrade, Demid?"

"Here, Father."

Ayub pointed without looking around, to the nearest armorer's shed. Against the wall in the sun was seated a young Cossack half a head shorter than Ayub. With a piece of tallow he was stroking the blade of a long simitar across his knee. Wrapped high around his thighs was a green-silk scarf, worn in despite of Moslems.* At his side lay a light shirt of Damascus mail, carefully polished.

Demid's eyes, slanting a little, and his dark skin marked him among the other Cossacks. Thin, distended nostrils, and firmly set lips bespoke moodiness and temper, the heritage of the hot-blooded Ukraine. Demid was from the Don country, beyond the frontier, where the men did not take kindly to discipline. He had already earned the title of *bogatyr*—hero. The other Cossacks, remembering that he had slain the first swordsmen of the camp when he came to the Siech, let him go his own way, which seemed to suit him.

*Green, being the color worn by the *hadjis*, was forbidden to other Moslems, and on an infidel was always a provocation to attack.

"To my hut!" ordered the *koshevoi*. "I have work for you, both."

Seating himself on a bearskin and laying aside his red topped hat—a sign that he spoke not as the chieftain, but as an elder Cossack—the commander related to the two warriors the loss of the powder.

"The Jews say that the shipment went past Kudak in an Armenian bark. It anchored the first night after that about sixty versts down the river. Two hundred kegs of powder were in the hold, marked with the mark of the merchant who sold to us. In the morning the bark was seen drifting down the Dnieper in flames. The thieves had made away with the crew and our kegs."

"How, made away?" demanded Ayub.

"The crew of the bark were not seen again. The powder was taken out because there was no explosion. Demid, you came to the Siech from the river-patrol. What have you learned of these pirates of the Dnieper?"

Demid considered, and explained slowly. He was not a talkative man.

The river-thieves had grown in numbers and boldness since the wars in the upper country began. Now that the only law in the land was the whim of a *boyar*, outlaw bands were many on the steppe. Possibly some nobles, turned renegade, took this means to recover lost fortunes.

The Dnieper, from the Cossack camp up to Kief was bordered by almost unbroken forests or the wilderness of the steppe. The pirates had hiding-places, which they changed constantly. If pursued, they retired into the waste lands. One band, the largest, had been driven over the border, where the thieves—plundering soldiers, vassals, criminals escaped from dungeons in the Russian cities—had turned Mohammedan, and had been protected by the Turks. This had not ended the raids, however.

Of late the river-bands had been sallying out in their long skiffs at night, when the trading-craft were forced to anchor. If the crew defended themselves, they were cut down without exception. The *burlaks*, the Russian watermen, feared the pirates whole-heartedly, and saved their lives by throwing themselves on their faces when an attack was made, to avoid recognizing any of the assailants. So the identity of the leaders remained hidden.

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The thieves had rich pickings, because much of the overland trade from Persia and Arabia to northern Europe came up the Dnieper.

The *koshevoi* nodded and spat thoughtfully.

"Do you know who the leaders are?"

Demid shook his head.

"Well, they are dogs, that is certain," meditated the chieftain. "They have not crossed our path until now. Our need is great. We must seek out these bands, and set our feet in the trail of our powder. If I send a company of Cossacks, it would only frighten off the men we seek. So I will send two."

"It is a cold trail," responded Demid. "We will go, Father."

"If you need aid, send word. I will give you a bag of gold. One thing will aid you. Your best plan is to ride to Kudak. The Starosta, the governor, is known to be a foe of the pirates, and he is a man with a heavy hand. I have prepared a passport, to take you to him, claiming protection on your mission and warning him of the danger from the Turks. Use your ears and your brains and keep a rein on your temper, Demid. The Muscovites will pick quarrels with you if given the chance."

Demid took the paper his chief gave him and bowed.

"In two weeks," added the *koshevoi* moodily, "ice will close the upper Dnieper to navigation. Your time is short. Choose good horses, and beware of the vampires that call to travelers in the steppe, especially such as take the form of women. If you see a werewolf, raise the hilt of your sword, like a cross, and he will howl and flee. Go with God!"

II

WHAT WAS SEEN ON THE RIVER

FOR several days Demid and Ayub made their way north along the river. They did not take a boat for two good reasons. Being Cossacks, they did not like to leave their saddles; being experienced in border warfare, they knew that they would see more from the ridges that ran beside the Dnieper than from the water.

Somewhere in the two hundred-odd miles that separated the camp they had left from the frontier fortress of Kudak the river-pirates had their retreats. Perhaps in a wooded inlet, perhaps in a rock-bound arm of the river, perhaps in the wide expanses of great reeds.

This stretch of the river was in the heart of the Ukraine. For miles the two riders passed under the dark canopy of oaks, already shedding their leaves. Sometimes they pushed on at night, where a clear stretch of prairie was ahead, listening to the clamor of waterfowl on the banks, and watching for the glimmer of fires.

But the only habitations were deserted posts of the Cossacks, and frontier hamlets. Close to the few thatched roofs pressed the vast level of grass, the Cossack steppe.

Such was the country called by the townspeople of Muscovy the Wilderness.

Ayub, well-pleased to be mounted again, with a mission in hand, still was irritated by their lack of success. The only river-craft they saw were fishing-smacks, and fly-boats with leather sails, or—rarely—the oared galleys of the Armenians, and the tub-like barks of the Muscovites bearing the loads of caravans from China or Ispahan.

"The *burlaks*, the dogs of watermen," he grumbled, "swear by their heads that they reck not of thieves. The fishermen look the other way and say that pirates may be elsewhere on the Dnieper but not here or at Kudak."

He felt moodily in his saddle bags for barley cakes. The Cossacks only halted to cook one meal, and then at evening, after they had brought down some game. Handing one of the hard cakes to his comrade, Ayub broke the other over his heel and, after breathing a prayer, fell to munching it.

"They lie, the sons of Turkish bath-tenders!"

Demid hooked one leg over his saddle peak, and smiled.

"A comet is in the sky, *kunak*. It means that death will walk over the steppe. Aye, so."

"True," nodded the big warrior seriously, "the river-folk tell of many omens. Was not a fiery cross seen in the sky over Kudak in the last moon? Then, too, they heard bells tolling under the water, at night."

Quickly Demid looked up.

"Many times or few?"

"The cross was beheld once, and the next day a galley, bound for the Black Sea was taken by the pirates. The bell sounds when

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the wind blows—often. It bodes no good to Christian folk."

Cheering himself with this remark, Ayub spurred ahead, for he liked not a hand pace. Demid followed, watching the dark line of reeds at the edge of the gray water. They were passing over rolling grassland, and except for a handful of huts abreast them, no sign of human life met his eye. Above a clump of willows by the huts several hawks and vultures were circling lazily.

Ayub would have passed by the shacks, but the Don Cossack called his attention to the hovering birds and headed down the slope toward the bank. The huts, on closer view, seemed without inhabitants. From the willows, however, came a penetrating odor that made the ponies uneasy.

"Carrion," grunted Ayub.

"And men," added Demid, "or the kites would not stay aloof."

Rounding the willows they rode along the shore and drew rein simultaneously.

"Well," observed Ayub between his teeth, "here are our pirates."

A half-dozen tattered fishermen were working with long poles to push off a raft that had grounded abreast their hamlet. The raft was made of stout planks and beams; in its center was a wooden pillar; from the summit of this projected a nest of cross-pieces. And from each of these, as if from a gallows, hung the body of a man.

The bodies dangled on ropes, turning slowly in the light wind. Hooks inserted under the ribs held them up. The hands of the victims were bound behind their backs. Flies and gnats clouded the flesh of the men, most of whom were dead. Two still moved their limbs.

The fishermen abandoned their poles and stepped back in fear as the Cossacks rode closer. As they did so a faint sound came from the pillar and Demid saw that a small bronze bell was hung over the cross-pieces. Under this was a parchment bearing writing, stuck to the post by a dagger.

"What says the missal?" he asked.

At this a strange figure that had been lurking in the background pushed forward. It was a man no larger than a dwarf, wrapped in a black cloak, yet bearing on his curled locks a high black cap, like a sugar loaf. The toes of his limp shoes were long as his arms. On his back was a light pack.

"Worthy Cossack," he responded, "the parchment bears the seal of the exalted Starosta, John of Kudak, lord and governor of the lower Dnieper. Over the seal is written, 'River thieves, done to death by my command for their crimes.' "

"Who," asked Ayub curiously, "in the name of all the —— are you?"

The olive face of the man in black broadened in a smile, and his puckered eyes glimmered shrewdly.

"O sir, I am Hermaphron, the Greek. In my pack are multitudinous blessed relics. Whatever your sins—and, since you are a Cossack, they must be many—two zecchins will buy you salvation in the form of a toenail of the holy Saint Stephen. Or, I will sell you a bit of iron from the brazier that did to death Saint Lawrence. Or—for a paltry three golden sequins of full weight—you may have a fragment of the stone that was cast at——"

Hermaphron broke off in alarm when Demid urged his horse into the water to gaze up closely at the twisted and distorted faces that were barely to be recognized as human. Above the fly-infested bodies the bell clanked, once, mournfully. A pair of red eyes glared down at the young Cossack.

"Water! In the name of the Father and Son—water!"

Kneeling on his saddle, and steadying his horse with a word, Demid climbed to the float and cut down the naked form from which the voice had come. It was a youth, with long yellow hair; dying, Demid judged. The barb of the hook had penetrated his vitals.

"Have a care, Cossack!" Hermaphron cried. "It is the law of the Starosta that no aid be given the thieves. These are some of the band that sank the Venetian galley in the last moon. Whenever the float drifts ashore it is to be pushed off—so!"

To this the Dnieper men nodded agreement. Seeing that Demid would pay no attention to their warning, they whispered together and disappeared toward the huts. Not for gold itself would they be seen standing near when one of the doomed thieves was brought ashore, against the command of the governor.

After placing the dying man under a tree, Demid went to the river and filled his sheepskin cap with water. The sufferer gulped it eagerly, never ceasing the while to moan. When he had his fill Demid dipped his neck-cloth in the water and washed the

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boy's face, and the swollen flesh around the wound.

Hermaphron, meanwhile, capered around, voicing his fear, until the Cossack looked up at him squarely.

"Relic-seller, have you in your pack a talisman that will stop the flow of blood and heal this hurt?"

"Aye, noble sir, that I have. An ikon, blessed by the thrice-holy——"

"Then give it this lad."

The Greek stared and fingered his beard.

"Ah, handsome warrior, you jest. By Krivonos, that is it! What could this miscreant pay? Besides, that would be against the command of my lord, the Starosta. But surely—" the keen eye of the relic-seller took in the fine mail and the red leather boots of the Cossack—"you, noble knight, must be in need of a talisman. A piece of silk, taken from the robe of a statue in the Moscow church—protection against vampires. An Egyptian powder, made by magicians—put it into a cup of the girl you wish to love you. Eh, eh! Which shall it be——"

Demid, watching the face of the condemned man, held up his hand. The youth in the grip of fever, was raving.

"To sword, you dogs— Man the side wall— Nay, I call them accursed traitors!"

His eyes opened wide, and even Hermaphron was silent.

"Water, I say water! Feodor, Ivan! Where are the servants?"

For a moment he stared into the dark eyes of the moody Cossack.

"A stranger—a man from afar. What do you, sir, on this threshold of ——? Stay, bear word from me." His hand gripped Demid's wrist. "To Ileana, I say. Bid her avenge me——"

"What is your name?" asked Demid quickly.

The voice of the sufferer fell into a mumble, and presently the Cossack saw that he was dead. Hermaphron touched his shoulder.

"Look to yourself, Cossack. Yonder on the highway come some men of the Starosta. Aye, one of the dogs of fishers is with them, and no doubt has told them of your crime."

The river-road that led to Kudak was within arrow-shot and a tall man in the livery of the governor spurred his horse down the bank. Two men-at-arms followed, scowling at the Cossacks. The leader peered down at the body of the boy and then examined the raft. Noticing that one of the victims still lived he ordered a soldier to end his life, and watched while the man went out to the float and cut the throat of the last survivor.

"Two days, and still alive!" the officer grumbled. "Satan himself must be in their hides. Well, they won't be taken down by their mates, now. What are you doing, Cossack, so near to Kudak? What do you mean by breaking the command of his serene excellency, the Starosta?"

As Demid occupied himself with filling and lighting his pipe, and Ayub merely grunted, the governor's man went on:

"I am Lieutenant Varan. Stand up, you dogs, and answer for yourselves——"

"In good time, serene, mighty lieutenant," rumbled Ayub, who had held the rank of colonel in the Cossack camps. "Is that sword stuck on your back to frighten away ghosts, or do you use it on your horse?"

Already Demid had noticed that the officer was armed with one of the great German broad swords, hung in a scabbard over his shoulder. From point to pommel it measured a full five feet. The long hilt ended in a silver knob as large as a man's knotted fist; the two-edged blade was straight and the whole must have weighed fifty pounds—a two-handed weapon of the northern soldiery.

The lieutenant straightened in the saddle abruptly. His cheeks went red.

"On your face, jackal! Down on your face! What words, to an officer of the Starosta!"

Ayub's brows drew together and he began to snort.

"Ekh-ekh! An end to words! Stand down from your horse and pluck out your skewer."

The man Varan moved quickly. He was out of his saddle and swinging around his head the five-foot blade before one of his men could catch the reins of his horse. At sight of him, Ayub fell into a cold anger; his teeth gritted together and he made his heavy saber sing in the air.

"Cut, slash!" he barked.

He gathered himself together for a spring when he was halted by Demid who had made a trip to the river and back. The young Cossack had filled his cap anew and emptied it over the head of his companion.

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"Cease howling, wolf," he said briefly, thrusting Ayub back. "The *koshevoi* warned us to keep clear of quarrels and now you would let out the life of the first Muscovite you meet."

Glancing at Ayub critically, he saw that the big warrior was too enraged to hold back from a fight. Turning to Varan, he said:

"With the flat of the blade—the flat of the blade! We bear letters to the Starosta and blood must not fall here."

But Ayub was not satisfied with this. He had been watching the play of the northern broad sword enviously.

"Nay, brother, I will slice his liver for those words. But if you will let me keep his sword, I will not harm him."

The lieutenant stared at the Cossacks curiously. He had all a townsman's distrust of the Cossacks, who were seldom seen in Kudak. He knew their hot temper—the recklessness with which they fought. With the edge of the saber Ayub would be formidable; but with the flat of the blade he would have the advantage. A blow of his two-handed weapon would dislocate his adversary's skull or crush in his ribs.

Moreover, Varan, who matched Ayub in height, was bent on maintaining his reputation before his men. On the river, he was known to be a hard customer. It would be a feather in his cap, to take the sword of an *ataman* from the Cossack war-camp.

"If you disarm me," he said disdainfully, "the broad sword is yours. But I'll strip you of your saber and give it to the girls of Kudak——"

"So be it," nodded Demid. "Begin."

He stepped back and Ayub sprang forward, taking the full sweep of the heavy sword on his saber. For all the Cossack's great strength, the impact of the two-handed weapon crushed down his blade and whirled him aside with a bruised shoulder.

Instead of drawing out the soldier, the Cossack gathered himself together and leaped in again. Varan's teeth gleamed, for this was to his liking. Stepping back a pace, he swung hastily.

But before he could put the full swing of his shoulders into the blow, Ayub, judging distance and speed instinctively, parried the stroke, his long saber clashing full against the straight sword. Varan had to spring back to escape his answering cut.

Demid smiled, and then fell serious. His comrade, rushing in, was met by the massive pommel of the lieutenant's weapon. Varan had thrust his hilt at Ayub's forehead with all his strength. It might well have brained the Cossack, but Ayub's head rolled aside and the end of the hand-guard merely raked the side of his skull, drawing blood.

The watching soldiers shouted, and Varan, seeing his chance, spat full into Ayub's eye, and leaped clear. As he did so, he swung down on the out-thrust hilt. The long blade rose from behind his shoulders in a wide arc.

Standing close, and half-stunned by the blow on his head, Ayub had no chance to step back beyond the sweep of the two-handed weapon. Nor could he parry a down blow with his lighter blade.

He dropped his saber, and his next movement was so quick that only Demid followed it. Ayub turned about, thrusting his shoulders against Varan's chest, gripping as he did so, the silver ball of the other's sword-hilt in his right hand. The impetus of Varan's full stroke was too great to check, and Ayub pulled down, arching his back as he did so.

Only one result could follow, unless Varan released his grip on his sword. But he held fast, and was sent flying through the air, over Ayub's back. A wrench of the Cossack's forearm and shoulder, and the great blade was twisted from the lieutenant's grasp.

Varan struck earth on his head and shoulder four paces away. When he could sit up and look around, the Cossack was bending over him. Ayub had strapped the two-handed weapon to his back and was holding out his old saber.

"Here is a good blade, Muscovite," he said grimly. "Use it fairly, instead of spitting like a cat."

By way of answer Varan caught the saber and whirled it far into the river. Then without a word he went to his horse and made off, going north along the trail, followed by his men. Demid watched them out of sight. It was too bad that Ayub had lost his temper and made an enemy of one of the officers of the Starosta. Varan would undoubtedly go to John of Kudak with his version of the quarrel, and the Starosta would take the word of his men against the Cossacks, especially after Demid's defiance of the order against cutting down the condemned pirates.

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Demid had no mind to reprove his companion. Instead he went to inspect the body of the criminal. Frowning, he noticed that the hand of death had smoothed away the harsh lines of suffering. Weak and dissipated the face of the boy was, but there was in it something of pride and beauty. The boy had babbled of servants; he had been born of noble parents.

"Cover the body from the kites and wolves," Demid commanded the fisher-folk who had drawn near again to watch the fight. "Hermaphron, show us the shortest path to the gate of Kudak. It is time to go, for those who have the road before them."

"That will I, noble sir," promised the Greek, "for a silver ducat."

The Cossacks noticed that the relic-seller had an excellent horse—a black-and-white Arab—at hand in the bushes. They were off at a round pace, for Demid wished to be heard by the Starosta at the same time that Varan told his tale. Meanwhile, he ordered Hermaphron to reveal what he knew of the last exploit of the pirates.

No sooner were the three out of sight than the fishermen left the body of the youth, and began to wade into the water, seeking the sword that had been cast away. Once or twice they looked up in fear, for, down the river, the bell on the float sounded its mournful dirge with each puff of the rising wind.

A STORM, in fact, was rising over the Dnieper. White crests appeared where the wind countered the current. The lines of rushes bent under the breath of chill air, and the sky darkened behind the riders. Hermaphron's tale was jolted out of him, so swift was the pace set by Ayub, but Demid listened to each word.

Ten days ago the Venetian galley had passed Kudak, after paying the usual toll at the fortress. Like the vessel that had carried the powder of the Cossacks, it made a day's run down the river and moored for the night at an island Hermaphron pointed out.

The river-thieves had put out from the bank and had gained the island unseen by the crew of the galley.

The Venetian captain had been short-handed, what with the troubles in Kief, and had been assailed from shore and water. The pirates had killed him, and most of his men; several survivors had tried to swim to the mainland by swimming. They had not been heard from again. But the noise of the affray had reached a courier boat of the Starosta that was patroling down from Kudak.

The soldiers of the governor had drifted quietly on the current until within pistol-shot. Torches in the hands of the river-thieves, to light the plundering, had shown them what was going on. After firing a volley they boarded the merchant galley, drove the pirates to the island, and slew several, taking prisoner the half-dozen who had just been executed.

"Then the leader of the band was not taken?" Demid asked.

Hermaphron fingered his beard and glanced warily to right and left before answering.

"Nay, young sir, 'tis said along the river that the many bands have but one leader. He was not among the prisoners."

"Who is he?"

"Ah, why would you know that? He is a werewolf, a howler in the wilderness. He changes shape when pursued. His eyes can see in the dark, and 'tis said he rides to the witches' sabbath."

Hereat Ayub pricked up his ears and slowed the pace of his horse noticeably.

"That is an evil thing," he muttered, crossing himself.

"John of Kudak," said Demid slowly, "has a heavy hand. He must have tortured the captives. Aye, there were scars and lashes on the boy's body. What did they confess?"

"True," smiled the Greek. "The dogs rode the wooden mule, and caressed the thumb-screw and the iron jacket. They said this of their leader: He keeps apart from their lairs, which they change after each venture. When spoil has been taken the thieves scatter and bear it to a place named by their chief. In exchange they receive each one, justly, a sum in gold or jewels. When a venture is toward, the word is passed down the river and they are met by this monarch of darkness, who takes the tiller of the craft they are in. When the fight is over, he stands guard with the best armed on the shore until the others have gone inland with the plunder. Then he joins them at the appointed place and pays them, as I have said."

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"What manner of man is he? What name bears he among the bands?"

Hermaphron grimaced and touched his pack as if for protection against evil.

"By Krivonos, much have I heard in the kitchens of the castle of Kudak, but not that. One says one thing, another the contrary. They call him the Lord of the River. Some swear that he is a renegade noble; others that he has sold himself to the Turks, or the ——, which is the same thing."

Demid leaned over and tapped the bundle that Hermaphron cherished.

"An end to these wives' tales, Greek, or I cast your goods into the Dnieper. What was confessed concerning the fate of the Armenian bark a month ago?"

"As God is my witness, I know not, sir knight."

Hermaphron started again as a mighty hand gripped his off shoulder and Ayub snarled at him.

"Tell what you have heard of the powder that was meant for Cossack hands, or you will fly after your bundle, and Satan will open the door under the river for you, because he loves a Greek."

The eyes of the relic-seller blinked shrewdly, even while he groaned.

"O *dies iræ*—O day of doom! What misery besets an honest man! Worthy champion of the Christians, I heard that the Lord of the River himself took over the bark, because the powder was too weighty to carry afoot. He went down the river."

III

CONCERNING VAMPIRES

THEY pushed their horses hard, but it was after the hour of sunset when they drew up before the river-gate of the fortress of Kudak.

Twice, in the gathering darkness the Greek had wandered off the narrow trail. Over their heads the wind from the steppe howled and twisted, and lashing rain beat down on the high bell tower, the sheer stone wall of the fortress and the clusters of peasants' huts outside.

A sentry at the postern answered their hail with a curt warning to be off and about their business.

"Ah, sir knights," said the Greek dolefully, "'Tis an hour after the time of the closing of the gate. By order of the Starosta, John of Kudak, no man may enter or leave the fortress between sundown and sunrise. Not he himself may have the gate opened."

The Cossacks, accustomed to the open steppe, were turning aside indifferently to seek shelter under the nearest trees, when Hermaphron checked them. The rain was soaking under his cloak and his teeth were chattering with cold.

"Let us go to the manor house of the princess. Wayfarers, barred from the gate are wont to find shelter there."

"What princess?" asked Ayub distrustfully.

"Ileana of Khor. Aye, one or two *versts* back, the way we came, then inland, on an arm of the Dnieper a couple of pistol-shots. The Khor family were once masters of all the lands of this province. The men of the family followed the wars, and made many debts. Aye, they were wild folk. They drank up the Khor lands, district by district. Yet, keeping to the ancient custom, they garnish their table well, and all who ask bread and salt in the name of Christ are welcome. To the house servants I have sold many tokens, most efficacious——"

"Lead the way!"

The arm of the river proved to be a small inlet with a fishing-village at its head. Some smacks and a light galley were moored here, and following the path that ran up from the jetty beside the galley they came to a low wooden palisade at the edge of the forest.

"Who comes?" a challenge greeted them at the horse gate.

"Hermaphron," responded the Greek, "and two Cossacks, turned off from Kudak."

Demid and Ayub heard a man moving in the darkness beside them, and then on the path up which they had come. Evidently the guards of the wall did not rely too much on the word of the Greek, and were investigating for themselves. It was all done too quickly and quietly for Russians and the gate swung open silently.

They were led to the stables at one side the enclosure by an archer, who turned over their horses to a serf to be rubbed down and fed. The manor house itself was joined to the outbuildings—a rambling structure of rough boards with many wings. Within the palisade was the odor of wet hay, of cattle.

Hastening into the hall, the Greek led them into a long room where two stone

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fireplaces crackled and blazed. The Cossacks uncovered and bowed low.

An old Tatar servant advanced toward them, glancing from the visitors to the woman who sat in the high seat by one of the fires. Demid saw that three archers stood in the entrance behind them, awaiting what word the Princess Ileana should be pleased to give as to the treatment of her guests.

"O most worthy princess," chattered Hermaphron, "my companions are not of my choosing. As I live, they settled themselves on me like flies. They would have thrown me in the river, if I had not shown them the way here. Truly they are men from below the rapids—brigands and steppe riders, spillers of blood——"

"Now, by——"

The insult began to take effect on Ayub, when Demid gripped his shoulder with a swift warning.

In the upper country, far from the frontier, where they were now, the Cossacks were received warily. Being masterless men, the lords of the land looked on them as little better than rebels, while the villagers dreaded their forays for horses and food when supplies failed in the camps along the Dnieper.

So, in the hall of the high-born, it would have needed only the word of Ileana to have the Cossacks turned off with a beating. If Ayub had started a quarrel, the two of them might well have been set upon and bound, to be torn apart by wild horses. Doubtless, before this happened, they would have reddened the floor of the manor house with the blood of the retainers, but Demid judged that two-score armed men were within the palisade, and even Ayub's great sword could not prevail against arrows.

Glancing swiftly at Hermaphron, he saw the round face of the Greek screwed up in relish of some jest.

Still gripping the muttering Ayub, he turned to Ileana, cap in hand, and he did not speak.

In fact he would not have known what to say to the princess. Her head came no higher than his chin, but, withal, she stood straight as a slender cedar on the step of the high-seat. Instead of the bulky dress of the Russian women she wore a sleeveless Turkish *khalat* of shimmering silk, and no cap adorned her black hair, that fell in two tresses to her knees.

Ileana had the clear gray eyes of the northern folk, slanting slightly upward. Seeing the whiteness of her throat and hands, Demid thought of the wax images of the saints that stood in the churches of the Ukraine. So grave was she, and so delicate her face.

"Name me these—men from below," she said to Hermaphron. She spoke as one accustomed to the silence of others in her presence.

"The warrior with the great sword is Ayub. The other, your excellence, is the young *bogatyr*, the hero Demid. They are from the Siech below the rapids."

"And they were barred from Kudak?" the low voice of the princess went on.

"Aye, so, Khorovna, my lady of Khor."

The eyes of the girl—for she was barely a woman in years—dwelt on Demid.

"All who are turned from the gate of the fortress are welcome to the manor house," she said, the shadow of a smile on her lips.

Then, extending her hands, Cossack fashion, she repeated the greeting of the Ukraine—

"We bid you to our bread and salt."

The Cossacks flushed with pleasure at the familiar phrase. Ayub, not quite sure of his ground when dealing with a princess, ducked his head several times, then fell to stroking his mustache. This reminded him that he had had nothing to drink except water for several days. "*Hai*, most worthy young lady, surely there will be rare good mead on the table where the welcome of the Cossack land is upon the lips."

Ileana considered him unhurriedly, and did not take offense.

"My grandsire, Rurik of Khor was a Cossack."

"Rurik the Fair?" Ayub roared his approval. "The captain of the falcon-ship that passed through the Dardanelles! The *bogatyr* who broke with his ax the chain the Turks stretched across the entrance! Eh, he could drink. My word for it! Such a hero as he was. He always swore the Moslems would never make him prisoner. When they overcame his falcon-ship after a spy had betrayed it to the Turks he caught up a keg of spirits and jumped into the waters. When they dropped nets for his body and hauled it up—" Ayub shook his head admiringly—"when they hauled up the hero Rurik he still had the keg, but it was empty. Such a man!"

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Ileana was looking into the fire.

"You shall have your mead, *ataman*, if you will tell me how you gained the sword of Varan, the governor's aid."

Nothing could have pleased Ayub more. The princess, in her seat by the fire, sipped a goblet of wine while the Cossacks, having rid themselves of their water-soaked *svitkas*, sat in their shirt sleeves over mutton and bread and mead. The Greek, meanwhile, had vanished.

While Ayub talked, Demid took in his surroundings. The walls were hung with richly woven tapestries, stirred fitfully by the breath of the storm outside. The table was the finest Venetian ebony, but the stools were of plain oak. Around the ikons were hung sets of rare Moslem simitars and casting spears, yataghans, and helmets of inlaid steel. Carpets from Bokhara were underfoot. Under a long iron shield, bearing a device obscured by age and hard knocks hung a crusader's lance, of a size to match Ayub's new sword.

Wealth and spoil the Khormen must have had, the young Cossack thought, yet the things were old, and gaps showed where some had been taken down, perhaps to be sold. The parents of Ileana were dead; she was not married, as the dress of her hair made clear. Yet several ger-falcons resting sleepily on their perches and hunting gear hung in the outer corridor indicated that a man was master of the manor house. The house serfs were few, Tatars, for the most part, like the major domo who never left the hall.

"What is the news upon the river?" Ileana asked, when Ayub had ended his tale.

"The pirates," Demid answered, "sacked a Venetian galley, and were set upon and slain for the most part by the river-guard of the governor."

The mistress of Khor bent down to pat a lean wolfhound at her knee.

"Aye, that. But no new boat from Kief has reached Kudak?"

He shook his head.

"I think not."

Studying her face in the firelight he knew that he had seen one like it not long since. The arched brows, the down-curved lips—Demid frowned, fingering his glass.

"You have brothers, princess?" It was beyond belief that in these evil times a child like Ileana could hold intact even so small a place as Khor.

"Aye, Cossack, one. Prince Michael journeys to Kudak from the university at Kief." She smiled, a glint of pleasure in her eyes. "He was tired of books and comes back to his horses."

"By the river?"

"Aye. He is overlong on the way."

She looked, from an impulse of habit at the tall gilt clock that marked off seasons and changes in the heavens as well as the hours.

"But Michael is ever minded to wander." This, as if reassuring herself.

"Has the prince your brother fair hair?"

"Indeed, he is fair as I am dark. Yet his eyes are like mine."

Demid nodded.

"Pardon, young mistress—I think I have met him, although his name was not known to me. Had he with him two servants Feodor and Ivan?"

"Ivan is his body-servant, who always accompanies Michael. This Tatar—" she indicated the old major-domo—"we christened Feodor. How could you meet him, on the river, when you came from below, and only as far as this?"

Demid glanced around the room, made sure that Hermaphron was not visible, and reached for the tankard of mead. Taking time to weigh his words, he was aware that Feodor, under pretense of making up the fire, was studying his face with shrewd old eyes.

"My news of your brother," he answered, "is, that he passed Kudak, on some venture. He is bound down the river."

"Without word to me?" Ileana drew herself up. "Cossack, you presume on your welcome. Why would Prince Michael go down the river without at least sending Ivan to announce his arrival?"

Demid remained imperturbable.

"Lady, if you would tell me what business the prince, your brother, was engaged in, then I could say why he passed Kudak secretly."

For a moment her fine eyes challenged him. Then she sighed and turned back to the wolfhound.

"You are from afar and know not my brother. It is true that he does not confide his plans to me, for he says that I am mistress within the four walls of Khor, and he is master of the fields and river without."

She bent nearer the fire as if chilled by

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the little breaths of wind that passed through the great hall.

"*Ai-a*, would he were here! Feodor says that the omens on the river have been bad. We of Khor have no secrets, Cossack."

Demid bent his head.

"It must have been a hunting venture that took Michael past his home. His last letter bade me under-feed his falcons, so that they should be ready for the field. Nay, after all—" she forced a smile—"your word is good, for it means that Michael was not on the trading-galley that was pulled down by the pirates."

Now Ayub had been listening with increasing interest.

"True, young mistress," he boomed suddenly, "the craft that bore your brother was not at all like a galley. It was——"

Beneath the table Demid's boot struck his ankle forcibly.

"It was a barge, young mistress."

To Ayub he whispered:

"Dolt! We have crossed a lofty threshold. Drink as much as you want but keep your mouth shut!"

The old Tatar regarded them distrustfully, and when Demid began to quaff from the tankard, Ileana of Khor spoke to him no more. Ayub was flushed; his head rolled on his high shoulders. The young Cossack swayed in his seat, and hummed snatches of song under his breath.

After all, they were only two Cossacks, who were getting themselves drunk, as the men from below were wont to do. She summoned Feodor, bade him fetch another tankard for the guests, and leave them to their own devices. This done, she resumed her watching of the gilt clock, waiting for Prince Michael, who would never stride over the threshold of Khor again.

AYUB was afire with curiosity and a new interest. So he began to whisper to Demid, and since the *ataman* had learned to talk under his breath during the hours of sitting beside the lair of a stag, gun in hand, or with his men, under the walls of a hostile camp at night, no one else heard him.

"By the Swineherd of Mecca, do you not see that the prince was the man on the governor's hook? He it was you pulled ashore from the raft of the dead. His face was twin to this queenlet."

"I am not blind."

Demid's dark face was moody and his eyes, half-closed, moved restlessly.

"God have mercy on his sinful soul. He was a pirate, a leader of river-thieves."

"But not the leader of the bands."

"Why do you hide it from the girl?"

Demid shook his head, keeping time to his almost voiceless chant.

"Hearken, Demid!" The big warrior leaned closer. "This brat is other than she seems. As sure as the —— wears hoofs. How else is she left alone, mistress of a wide estate? Eh, the nobles of the countryside must fear her. Then she is a witch. That is certain. So she has put a spell on you, brother. I never saw you drink like a fish before and your eyes are like coals."

From behind crossed fingers and thumb, he surveyed the silent Ileana.

"Ekh, why else was she so pleasant of tongue to two *kunaks*? All Russian women paint their faces, and hide them from strangers. She is white as a hungry vampire, a demon woman. If you don't watch carefully she will let out your blood. Then her cheeks will be red enough."

Wine always made Ayub moody. In his eyes women were more dangerous than a whole company of spear-bearing Turks, or a *chambul* of Tatars. Every one knew what a Moslem was after. But who could tell what was in a woman's mind? Moreover this one had a score of bow-men at her call. What had become of Hermaphron? He heard the outer door open and close, and voices in the corridor. Feodor advanced to the entrance, but fell back with a quick salaam.

"The serene, mighty Starosta!" the major-domo announced, adding to the house serfs—

"On your faces, dogs!"

Demid looked up at John of Kudak with interest. The governor stripped off a soaked fur-coat, tossed it to Feodor, and advanced toward Ileana and the fire. A few paces from her he bowed—a broad-shouldered man, bearded to the eyes, in the Russian fashion. He had plump, red cheeks, and a good-natured smile. His long inner coat was of heavy silk, embroidered in gold, its stiff collar pearl-sewn.

"Health to you, princess!" his deep voice rolled forth pleasantly. "I am belated at my own gate, and so may not enter it."

Ileana inclined her head.

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"Is any threshold strong enough to bar the lord of Kudak?"

The governor laughed.

"A good leader does not break his own rules. We were driving a stag far down the river on the Tatar bank, and the storm delayed our return. So—will Khor receive me as a guest?"

"We bid you, my lord, to our bread and salt."

She motioned to Feodor to bring bread and meat and wine for the governor. This being placed on the table near the Cossacks, John of Kudak stared at them fleetingly.

"Two men from below. Ah, the tall one is he who tossed Varan and took his sword." The governor seated himself and began to attack the well-stocked wooden platters with a vim. "Your name? Well, Ayub, watch your skin. Varan will rub you out if he gets the chance. He is an ill man to anger."

He filled a pewter goblet with wine and stood up, bowing to Ileana.

"Your health, and Prince Michael's. May he soon join us with his falcons, before snow ends the hunting. You—" he turned to Demid—"have letters for me. Where are they? A candle, Feodor. Princess, I am a poor clerk. Will you read them to me?"

As Ileana, in her low voice, repeated the message of the commander of the Cossacks, that the governor do no harm to the two riders sent into his territory, and that aid be given them to search for the vanished powder of the Cossacks—John of Kudak listened carefully, and was silent a moment.

"One moon has passed over us," he said at length, "since the river-thieves stripped the Armenian bark, and their chief bore off your powder. The forty kegs of powder are worth their weight in silver now. By now he will have sold them to the armies fighting in the north or to the Turks."

He took the letters from Ileana, tore them across and cast the pieces into the fire.

"You do not know by which road the powder has been sent from the wilderness, my Cossacks. Nor can you find the Lord of the River. With all my harrying of the pirate, no men of mine have laid eyes on him. He may be Beelzebub. My advice to you is to draw your reins toward the Siech, from which you came, while you are still alive."

The Starosta was a man of plain words. He was fair-minded enough to overlook Ayub's quarrel with his lieutenant, and he did not lack courage. Otherwise, he would not have left his retinue and come, armed only with a hunting-knife, among strangers. Understanding this, Demid weighed his words.

"Your excellency, have you no thought as to where the Lord of the River may be found?"

"I have not. When his men make their strike on the river near Kudak I try to strike back, before they vanish into the waste lands. But to lead my soldiers into the wilderness would be like sending dogs after birds. Vain. My orders are to hold Kudak for the Russians."

He struck the table with a powerful fist.

Demid pulled at his mustache thoughtfully. "I thank you for your words, excellency! Starosta, the frontier is bare of powder. No more will come down from Kief. While the kinglets and the lordlings are shooting each other to pieces above us, the Turks are creeping up on the frontier. Unless the Cossack camps have powder before the Dnieper freezes over, the Moslems will be masters of the border posts. Then, when Spring sets in, and the Wilderness ceases to be a swamp, they will overrun Kudak and Kief and the other cities."

"You have been making love to Mother Vodka! Drunken tongues have wagged on the frontier. Why do you annoy me with old wives' tales?"

"Because, if our powder should be lost, we will buy half of yours at your price."

The governor pulled down a clay pipe from the wall, took tobacco from his girdle and called Feodor to bring the candle. Blowing a puff of smoke into Ayub's face, he smiled.

"No. What is mine is mine. The fortress must keep its magazine full." He was not ill-pleased that the Cossacks should lack powder. Given sufficient provocation, the men from below were as apt to raid the Muscovites as the Turks.

The Cossacks were silent. Born and bred in the Wilderness, they were ill at ease behind walls. They could follow the trail of a stag for days, but to find scent of the game they sought in the crowded

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alleys of the fortress would be a hard matter.

"Nay then," responded Demid, "we will draw our reins to the steppe. There must be signs of the river-thieves along the bank."

Ayub glared at his comrade in owlish surprise. Had not they decided that nothing was to be seen along the river?

"Well, I have warned you. Do not blame me if you are taken by the river-thieves and hung up on hooks, in reprisal for my punishment of the pirates."

A little thickly, Ayub spoke.

"Nay, excellency. Whoever rubs us out will have short shrift and no priest. Our comrades of the Siech will come to ask what has been done to us; then ten thousand Cossack sabers will be bared, and blood will be shed for blood. This youngling, Demid, is a *bogatyr*. If harm comes to him the Siech will roar, and the *kunaks* will tumble into their saddles."

Under lowered brows the governor studied the warrior.

"Dog of the ——! You are men to my liking. Enter my service and I will give to each the rank of captain. You'll have a rare frolic then."

Demid shook his head.

"We were sent on a mission. Our thanks to you, excellency, but we are men of the Siech."

It was seldom that adventurers refused an offer of service with the most powerful noble on the lower Dnieper. John of Kudak shrugged and left the table, when Demid began to drink again. In a moment the candlestick that he had left behind crashed over, and, glancing back, he saw Ayub asleep, his head pillowed on his arms and Demid swaying back and forth in the shadows.

"Fools!" he muttered. "They could have gone far with me. And now, princess, we are done with your dainty guests. Our reckoning is at hand."

For some time the manor of Khor had been in arrears in the tithes due the governor of the province, John of Kudak. The civil war in the north had loosed bands of lawless men on the steppe, and cattle were missing from the farm. Moreover her brother at the university had called upon Ileana for considerable sums to pay debts. The harvest had been good, but men had been lacking to gather it in, and early rains had rotted a good deal of the grain. So the impost due the Starosta, unpaid in the last year, had doubled itself, with interest. There was the head-tax, the horn-tax, and the fire-tax.

Whereas the first men of Khor had been sole masters of an estate the size of a small kingdom, and of all the souls upon it, times had changed. The empire had stretched its bounds to the Dnieper, and the old owners were taxed on their possessions. Now that the emperor, Boris Goudonov, was dead, conditions were no better because the new *boyars* increased taxes and demanded levies of men for wars.

"Why do you come to me with your hand held out?" Ileana stood in her nook by the other fire, on the step of the high-seat, so that her eyes were on a level with the Starosta's. "You know we have no money laid by in Khor. What we could spare of grain and honey and grapes I have sent up into Kudak."

"But not enough to pay a fraction of your debts, princess."

"We could have paid more, if you had not bought off the best of my peasants before the harvest was in. Aye, and the half of my carts."

John of Kudak studied the woman before him, frowning a little.

"Your men were free to go or stay; they were needed in the upper districts. If Khor can not keep its serfs, you can not live——"

"Nevertheless, excellency, we manage to keep life in our bodies." Ileana smiled uncertainly. "My fishermen and the Tatar hunters see to that."

"If you choose to live with dogs!" The governor shrugged, and his bearded chin thrust forward. "You would do better to give up your holdings, and live in the fortress on what you will gain thereby."

He held up a finger as if explaining matters to a child.

"Princess, the lands of Khor are fertile. Large crops can be raised here next Summer. But the soil must be worked with skill. You know naught of such things. So your men seek masters elsewhere, save for the hunters and fishers and house servants, who are your slaves because they love you. Most men do."

Ileana pressed her lips together as if hurt. The Starosta glanced casually at the Cossacks, but failed to notice that Demid, leaning on the table, chin in hand,

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was quietly attentive. The two by the fire were speaking in low tones, yet the wind had died down and in the silence of the room he heard what was said.

"But I, Ileana," added the governor, "am not under your spell. Your dainty hands can not hold Khor together. Your brother is a drunken fool——"

"That you would not say if he were here!" The girl's eyes flashed. "He wears a sword, and he is the grandson of a warrior."

"By the saints! You will learn the truth of your brother in good time. I am no tale-bearer."

"Michael," said Ileana quietly, "promised me that when he came to Khor he would have money to pay most of the tithes. He has borrowed from his companions in Kief. He will be here on the morrow, for that was his word to me."

John of Kudak nodded thoughtfully.

"So be it. I will await the morrow."

"I thank your excellency." Ileana's bright smile mocked him, in the flickering firelight. "Feodor will lead you to your room. In other days it was the chamber of my grandfather, Rurik."

"Rurik the Fair met a bad death, princess. Such, it seems is the curse of your family. If Michael should leave you, as did your grandsire, would you give up Khor? It is a yoke on your shoulders."

"Nay, my lord." She shook her head slowly. "You do not understand. The place is like our blood—a part of us. The first men of Khor sailed down the river from here to the crusades."

Her glance went to the long spear, and she clapped her hands for the old Tatar.

After ushering the governor to a distant wing of the manor house and lighting his mistress to her sleeping chamber, Feodor returned to the hall to scrutinize the Cossacks doubtfully. Years of faithful service had earned him the trust of the masters of Khor, first of the grandfather, then of the princess. He was, in fact, as much a watch-dog as the scarred wolf-hound that dozed by the fire. Feodor was surprized to find the young Cossack striding up and down the carpet, wide awake and none the worse for drink.

Demid signed to him to approach. Again the Tatar was startled, although his dried-up, wrinkled face did not show it, when he was addressed in his own tongue.

"Wolf of the steppe, are you one in heart with the masters of Khor?"

"Allah gives! It is so."

"Allah gives wisdom. Did you know that the prince had joined the river-thieves, to get the gold that is needed in Khor?"

The old servant blinked, and shook his head slowly.

"Captain of swords and leader of many, it is not so. Prince Michael follows his own road, and no gold would lead him to join the fellowship of thieves."

This he said without anger, as one stating a known truth, and Demid thought it over for several moments. Feodor waited patiently.

"You have said what was in my mind," agreed the young Cossack at length. "Prince Michael will not ride into Khor tomorrow. He was slain in the attack on the trading-galley. I saw his body and covered it. To me he gave a message, bidding Ileana avenge his death."

The lips of the Tatar lifted at the corners, and the grunt in his throat was like a snarl.

"Allah send that it be so!" he answered. "The signs of evil were about the river."

His claw-like hands clutched at his hair, and he moaned his sorrow.

"The evil is not ended," continued Demid. "Your mistress must know that the prince is dead."

"How? How did it happen?"

Demid rubbed his sword-hilt moodily.

"That is dark. The fight on the galley was at night; your master was not slow to draw sword. He was wounded by the pirates, and stripped of his outer garments. When the soldiers came, they put him with the pirates, not knowing his face. Say that to your lady."

Feodor's black eyes glimmered with distrust. Plainly, he doubted this explanation.

"Fool!" repeated the Cossack under his breath, "your lady is as a dove, a thrush, and hawks are in the air. She will seek vengeance. The pirates slew your master. Then let her raise her hand against them. Thus she will strike against the doom that is coming upon her. I have spoken truly. Go!"

The Tatar bent his head, and looked up suddenly. "What road do you follow, Cossack?"

"My path lies with that of your lady, in this thing."

The two measured each other silently,

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and understanding came into the intent eyes of the servant. They were men from the steppe, the warrior and the voluntary slave of the *boyars*. Few words were needed to show what each had in mind. Feodor left the hall.

A roaring voice broke the silence.

"You are going to war, my lad,
You are going to war!
Your hide will be scratched,
And your throat will be dry,
When you are at war, my lad!"

Ayub had awakened, full of song. He was drawing breath for the second verse of the chant, when he stopped abruptly. The silence of the outer darkness after the storm was broken by howling. Moreover it was not the howl of a wolf, but the strident cry of a human being in mortal terror.

Staggering to his feet, Ayub reached for the broadsword and held up the long hilt.

"The sign! Make the sign, brother. The cross frightens away werewolves."

Footsteps pounded in the outer yard, and the outcry ceased. Presently the door was flung open and Hermaphron rushed in, followed by one of the Tatar archers. The Greek was panting and foam appeared under his oiled mustache; his hat was gone and his pack awry on his back.

"I have seen him!" he moaned. "*Deus accipe me!* His eye— Oh, his eye—it looked at me, and he said naught. Where is the princess?"

"In her room," responded Demid curiously. "Have you seen a witch?"

"Worse, oh terrible indeed!" Hermaphron peered into the shadows of the hall fearfully. "He called my name after me when I ran. Oh fool that I was, to venture forth on such a night——"

"How, terrible?" demanded Ayub, who shivered a little, seeing the stark fright of the dwarf.

"Is not the ghost of Rurik the Fair terrible? I saw it, walking in the wood near the camp of the Starosta's retinue. Prince Rurik it was, for I knew him in life. How his eye glared! It could see in the darkness. And he called after me."

"What did it say?" Ayub asked with great interest. Human foes were part of existence, but spirits were another matter, and the big warrior had his share of superstition. Not so Demid.

"It said, 'Hermaphron, son of many dogs!' "

Ayub nodded.

"So the *bogatyr* might have spoken. It was he. Why did you not hold up one of the blessed ikons in your pack——"

For once the fear of the relic-seller outran his tongue.

"Ah, my relics are common things made by an artificer in Kudak. I sell them to the low-born."

"Why," inquired Demid, frowning, "did you fear Rurik, the prince?"

Hermaphron blinked and clasped his quivering fingers together.

"Alas, noble sir, do not make me say what is best left unsaid. I was on my way to the camp of the Starosta's men to make some further sales, before their revelry ended. On the path where the pastures end and the forest begins, the ghost stepped out of the shadow and confronted me. The moon was over the trees and I saw his face. His eye glared at me, like a fiend's. Nay, it is in my mind that Rurik the Fair is leader of the thieves. He is Lord of the River."

Ayub swore feelingly and stared at the open door, while the Greek's voice rambled on.

"Noble sirs, I spoke to you this day of what should be left unsaid. So the Lord of the River sought me out to punish me. Let me in to the princess. If I can touch her dress I shall be safe from harm at the hand of the ghost."

He began to crawl toward the closed door that led to the rooms of Ileana. But Feodor appeared in the entrance and warned him away curtly. In spite of this, Hermaphron knelt as close to the door as possible, moaning to himself the while, of sins and ancient misdeeds.

Ayub did not sing again.

IV

A SWORD IN THE SCALES

BEFORE sunrise the two Cossacks saddled their horses and left the manor house. They passed the guards at the palisade gate and struck through the wet fields to a trail that led south along the river. Demid went at a

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hand pace, surveying the lay of the land carefully in the early light. Ayub followed docilely, quite sober, after hearing of the apparition of the night.

Once in the shadows of the forest, Demid turned off from the trail in a rock-strewn ravine where their horses left few tracks. After a while he struck back toward Khor, and reached the edge of the forest where a hillock rose above the tops of the old oaks. Tethering his pony in a clump of birches, he signed for Ayub to do the same, and crawled on hands and knees to the crest of the knoll. Here he could look out over the pastures and the brown stubble fields of the farm to the palisade, half a mile away. Protected by rocks and a growth of holly, the Cossacks, lying prone, were invisible from below.

The sun, rising over the river, warmed their chilled limbs. Ayub took barley cakes and a water-jug from one of his saddle-bags that he had lugged to their hiding-place, and they began to eat.

And then a shadow fell across the level earth of the hillock, although no clouds stood in the sky. It was a long shadow, and they made out the head and shoulders of a man—a man broad of shoulder, wearing a high cap.

Demid turned where he sat, but his eyes looked full into the rising sun. An arrow's flight away was a rocky knoll. Upon this the man must have stood, for the shadow had vanished as he turned. No one was to be seen, nor did he hear booted feet clambering back over stones.

"Do not disturb yourself, my brother," observed Ayub calmly. "It was the ghost, or fiend, or whatever he is. Doubtless he sank through the earth, to his quarters in purgatory. Now that the sun is high, he can not harm us. He was a tall devil."

Demid frowned. He had not wanted any one to know that they had remained within sight of the manor house. The trail they had taken away from Khor led through the Wilderness, along the barren shore of the river, where the Starosta supposed them to be headed.

"Vain to go into the Wilderness," he explained, lighting his short clay pipe. "Snow may fall any day—river will be frozen over. A fox does not hunt the same trails in Winter as in Summer—'tis in my mind that the leaders of the river-bands have come to Kudak, or near it."

"The whole thing, little brother, is clear in my mind."

Demid looked up inquiringly.

"This Lord of the River," Ayub vouchsafed, "is a ghost. Vampires of the steppe can climb up behind wayfarers and kill them by biting behind the ear. Certainly, there are ghosts on the river. That is why no one has been able to run down the Lord of the River; that is why he can see in the dark."

"Is this ghost Rurik the Fair?"

"Hermaphron says it, and with the forehead, too. A Greek is the sire of lies, but this Greek was frightened to his soul. He spoke the truth. Moreover Rurik was captain of the falcon-ship that ranged many rivers and unknown seas."

Demid half-rose to glance out at the farm. Seeing all quiet, he set back by Ayub.

"Would the spirit of Rurik slay his grandson, Prince Michael?"

"A ghost is a ghost. When he was taken, the tale runs that Rurik was tortured by the Turks. No one knows how he died, and probably his body was never covered. So his spirit is abroad. Besides, the hero followed the wars like a fleet hound; he took no thought for Khor and its girl, or the stripling of a boy. When Mother Death took Michael, he had been tortured enough. Aye, his soul must have cried out, 'Here I am, grandsire, let us frolic and work havoc along the waters!' "

"And the princess?"

"The girl Ileana, having a ghost for a grandsire, and another for a brother, must needs be a witch. Nay," Ayub pondered seriously, "she is a basilisk. Her gray eyes are overbright. She casts spells with them. The Tatars and the fishermen are her slaves. The Starosta has a light conscience and a heavy head. But she has laid her spell on him, and he can think of naught but her."

The big warrior sighed.

"I saw her eyes fasten on you. They glowed like witches' fires. Can you ride away from Khor? You can not. Your brain goes around like a waterwheel. You do not think of the powder our Cossack brethren need, nor of slaying pirates, but only of Ileana——"

Demid yawned and emptied his pipe, asking his companion to watch while he slept. Almost at once his eyes closed.

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Studying the splendid head of the young Cossack, the fine lips half-smiling in sleep, Ayub shook his head sadly.

"Drowsiness is a sure sign. He has looked into the eyes of a basilisk. Heavy his Cossack soul—vanished the thought of Cosscak glory. That is what a woman does." So he muttered to himself. "After all, the young ones are close kin to witches. They smile at men, first. Then they cry that they are in trouble, and set fever in the veins of the hero Cossacks. Swords are drawn, men die, and when all is said and done, the witches go about their affairs, having fed on a soul, while the hero turns up his toes. The —— take Ileana!"

By noon, however, Ayub became interested in the manor house. A cavalcade of riders appeared from the far side of the farm. A bugle sounded, and a company of foot soldiers, halberdiers, marched into view. They were followed by a score of servants and slaves, garbed in rich clothes but barefooted, bearing luggage of various kinds.

Several dignitaries—judging by their long fur-cloaks and the armor on which the sun glittered—advanced to the gate of the palisade. With these Ayub made out—for his eyes were keen, and the air clear—a motley crowd of buffoons, dwarfs—men and women, entertainers of the nobility. He thought he recognized Hermaphron, among them. Some of the slaves began to pitch silk tents beyond pistol-shot from the wall. The riders dismounted, while the men-at-arms formed in groups between the palisade and the river, and began preparing the noon-day meal.

"The Starosta," observed Demid, who had wakened at the sound of the bugle, "has come, as I looked for."

"With armed men and attendants," nodded Ayub. "He has posted them well. He was not born yesterday. That is the proper way to approach a basilisk."

The leaders of the party had been admitted to the palisade after a brief delay. They did not come out again, but several Tatars entered the Cossacks' field of vision, slipping through the outbuildings, and the hay-stacks, past the sentries. Once clear of the Starosta's lines, the fugitives began to run toward the wood, near the knoll.

"They must be driven by fear, or Tatars would never go an arrow-flight without a horse——"

"Or the stables are under guard."

With that Demid made his way down from the height, and, followed by the big warrior, intercepted the hunters.

"What has come upon you," the young Cossack asked in Tatar, "that you flee from Khor?"

The natives pulled up and looked at him fearfully.

"Allah preserve your honor," said one, "evil has come upon Khor."

"What evil, dog brothers?"

"It is not known to us—all of it. The thrice dignified khan of the *karaul*—the chief of the city—has brought up his horde. He has spoken loud words in the *kurultai*, the council in the hall. He says that money shall be paid him. Our lady has no gold. The chief of the city then said that he will proclaim her a debtor and gather spoil together to pay the debt. All things are ordained, and this also, by Allah. We fled before the slaying should begin."

"Without horses?"

"The soldiers are posted at the stables."

Demid glanced at Ayub.

"Are you the men of the *khanum*, or jackals?"

The hunters thought this over.

"We are her dogs, your honor. But we are uneasy, and the forest is our place."

"Then abide here, until one is sent for you. If you flee into the forest Cossacks will find you and strip you of your hides. Do you understand?"

The Tatars assented, and sat down, unstringing their bows at Ayub's pointed request. They did not know how many more of the Cossacks were in the forest. God had sent many things upon them, of late the taxes of the chief of the city, the death of their young lord, and a ghost. So also the Cossacks had been sent.

WITH many mutterings, and stifled misgivings, Ayub followed the *bogatyr* that night. He could not see any good in visiting Khor again, but as Demid set about doing so, the big warrior went along after impressing upon the Tatar hunters that if harm came to the horses of the Cossacks, left in their care, all the fiends of the Dnieper would be set upon their tracks, and their souls would be flayed out of their bodies.

It was not difficult for the Cossacks, who were accustomed to scouting in darkness,

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to make their way through the cow-sheds and stables unseen by the outer sentries of the Starosta. Nor did the palisade give any trouble to men of their height. They had chosen the second hour of darkness, before the rising of the moon, for their excursion.

Once within the wall, they listened a while to the sounds from the soldiers' camp outside the gate. Fires were going there, and the wail of a *balalaika* and the shouting of the buffoons showed that the under officers had dined well, and that the camp would not be moved that night.

A yellow square of light, glowing from Ileana's room indicated that the princess kept to her chamber. From time to time they caught the wailing of a woman-servant in the rambling outbuildings. Demid, keeping close to the logs of the manor house, advanced to the narrow embrasures of the main hall. At one of these he paused, listening to the hum of voices within. With his dagger he cut a piece the size of his hand from the thin horn that served for a window. Pulling the severed strip toward him he peered in.

Five men were seated at the long table, which bore the remains of a hearty dinner. At the foot of the table Hermaphron was filling a Turkish goblet with red wine, and near him the lieutenant, Varan, hooked his booted heels in the rungs of a Venetian chair of ebony and mother-of-pearl.

John of Kudak sat at the head of the table, with two strangers on either hand. One was a young officer, in the fur-tipped cloak of a Russian dragoon, his tunic ornamented with loops of silver. His companion appeared to be a merchant—a man with yellow, creased skin and weak eyes, who took snuff at intervals from a jeweled box. The Starosta was speaking in his clear, measured voice.

"Gentlemen, you have inspected the manor house and farm. Even in its run-down state the place is worth more than the two thousand thalers, which are the tithes, unpaid for more than two years."

"Khor is worth little," spoke up the merchant dryly, "for it is exposed to raids from river-thieves or brigands. As I live, it would take a round sum to put the farm in working order."

"True," nodded the governor. "But in this hall and the other rooms are sets of weapons and other spoil of the wars. Moreover one score and ten souls go with the farm."

The officer of dragoons tapped his glass reflectively.

"What of the Princess Ileana? Why does she stick to this dog-kennel? I have seen her in Kudak. With her eyes and manner, by Saint Nicholas, she could have a career in Kief—aye, or Moscow."

"She is of the old gentry, Cornet Boris. Her people stick to her like horseflies and she will not leave them."

"Shades of ——!" The officer's boots clashed on the floor. "Do you mean that the young witch chooses to be sold with the farm?"

John of Kudak was silent a moment.

"Such is her intention, voiced to me by the major-domo, Feodor. Her own words, gentlemen: 'If Khor is to be sold to another master, the new owner must purchase me.'"

"Bah!" The merchant scowled. "A wayward wench. How stands the law in this thing?"

"An insolvent debtor, Master Sigismund, is subject to the *pravioz*. That is, he must be tied up in a public place. If at the end of a month his debts are not paid, he himself may be sold and his family let out for hire——"

"Aye, in the case of the low-born. But this woman is a *boyar*, one of the old nobility. You can not tie her up like a horse."

"Ileana of Khor may claim trial before the supreme tribunal of Moscow, but the city is at war, and the courts are empty. I am the Starosta of the lower Dnieper, and she is subject to my judgment. I have dealt with her fairly. In view of certain offenses of Khor, known to me—" he hesitated briefly—"I declare the family of the Khor debtors to the government, and I decree that their property be sold into better hands. What the princess chooses to do with herself matters not at all to me. She has wild blood in her."

"But a face for the gods!" cried the Cornet. "The —— fly away with your law! Where is the young brother? Prince Michael cut a swathe among the students of Kief, and he'd call out the man that bought his sister, as surely as God has given me life!"

The governor frowned.

"Michael, I hear, was slain in the company of the river-thieves."

Cornet Boris tugged at his mustache,

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and his red face gleamed in the candle-light. Varan uncoiled his legs, to take the pitcher from Hermaphron.

"Then," cried the dragoon," —— my soul, but the Khoris forfeit their privilege as nobles——"

"Yet the girl has weapons and men," put in Varan.

"And I have a heart and half a squadron," responded Boris. "So Ileana of her own will is to be sold with Khor? Gentlemen, these are gladsome days. I give you the health of the princess!"

Standing, he lifted his goblet and drank the toast, followed by Varan. The sudden movement caused a stir among the falcons perched in the distant corner. Near them an old raven, a pet of Ileana's, croaked harshly.

"Death!" cried Hermaphron, glancing over his shoulder. "Ah, noble sirs, the omen of the raven is true as the message of the apostles."

While the five men stared uneasily at the drowsy birds, Varan struck his fist on the table.

"Michael is dead."

But Hermaphron had seen an apparition the night before, and his olive skin turned sallow as that of the money-lender Sigismund. His hand quivered as he reached for his wine-glass, and the red fluid was upset on the table. Varan made the sign of the cross. John of Kudak had no thought for omens. Taking a sheet of parchment from his coat, he laid it before him.

"Gentlemen, here is the title to Khor and its acres, and its plows, cottages and souls. I have placed thereto my seal, only the name of the owner is wanting. Come, who makes the first bid?"

He glanced at Varan inquiringly, but the lieutenant, staring at the crimson pool on the table, shook his head.

"Fifteen hundred thalers," offered Sigismund.

"Two thousand!" cried the Cornet Boris. "What dog would not bid as much to have the fair Ileana for handmaiden? By the five wounds!" he laughed hoarsely. "Summon her out of her room! We must see what we are buying."

The thin hand of Sigismund passed across his lips, and he dabbed at his weak eyes with a lace handkerchief. The Starosta gave the order to his servant, who alone attended them—Feodor having refused to serve the intruders. But when the man left the hall, John of Kudak half-rose in his chair and his eyes hardened. Demid and Ayub appeared in the outer door.

THE two Cossacks had entered the house unchallenged, as the Russians had contented themselves with posting guards at the gate of the palisade, preferring not to be overheard in their talk. Demid advanced to the table, while Ayub, leaning on his sheathed broadsword, took station behind Varan.

Drawing from his girdle a leather bag, the Don Cossack tossed it down by the governor's elbow.

"Gold, turquoise and emeralds, to the value of three thousand thalers," he said briefly. "I have a mind to Khor."

The officers and the merchant stared at the Cossacks in astonishment, but the governor made no response. It was not to his liking to have the manor house in the hands of men from below. Thinking to find fault with Demid's offer, he opened the bag and ran through his fingers the pieces of gold and the jewels. Realizing that their value was unquestionable, he pondered. In asking for bids, to comply with the form of law, he had sought to have only men allied to him in Kudak as buyers.

"Thirty-two hundred," spoke up the merchant Sigismund. "Half on my bond."

"What kind of a horse is this?" demanded the dragoon, who, being from the northern cities, had not seen a Cossack before. "These chaps are not Russians, and, my oath for it—they are not *boyars*."

"Henchmen of the *koshevoi*, the chief of the Cossacks below the rapids," explained John of Kudak. "Sent up the river to hunt the pirates."

He studied Demid curiously.

"You were for the Wilderness. No good can come of your meddling here. What will your commander say, when it is known that you gave over monies of the Cossacks to pay for a woman and her farm?"

It was a shrewd thrust, but nevertheless a true one. The funds had been given Demid by his chief, to aid in the recovery of the powder. Ayub knew this and was troubled.

Yet, when the young Cossack glanced at him inquiringly, he fumbled in his wallet and threw down on the table a handful of coins, a gold cross set with rubies and a

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turquoise ring. Believing that Demid was acting under a spell cast by the girl of Khor the big warrior could not endure seeing a Cossack worsted in any contest with the Russians.

"The worth of seven hundred thalers are here," he said bluntly. "So the Jews have sworn to me."

"Thirty-seven hundred!" breathed the governor.

"It is too much," snarled the merchant. "They are fools."

"Four thousand!" cried the dragoon, pulling at his mustache.

"And another thousand," added Demid, "on my word."

The officer bit his lip, and Sigismund sniffed.

"I will pay you the four thousand," said Boris slowly, "in Kudak on the morrow. What avails the word of an adventurer like this, against my payment?"

"Much," put in Ayub dryly. "The word of a Cossack is not smoke. This youth is a *bogatyr*. When he swore that he would ransom me, he did it by cutting off the head of a Turk."

At this John of Kudak smiled.

"I prefer the surety of the Cornet," he declared. "The manor house and the souls of Khor are sold to the officer, Boris."

"I offered more," observed Demid slowly.

"The decision rests with me. I am the viceroy of the Crown!" The governor drew himself up angrily. Just then the Cornet, who thought the matter settled, saw fit to propose a second toast, and to voice a thought that appealed to him more strongly than ever.

"To Ileana, my slave," he announced, raising a wine-glass.

There was a whistle of air, a flash of steel over the table, a crash of glass, and Boris stared blankly at the stem of the glass in his fingers. So quickly had Demid drawn his simitar and struck that the officer had not seen the blade meet his glass.

Demid's face had gone white. All the pent-up passion of his impatient spirit had been loosed by a word from the Russian. A child of the steppe, reared among the Cossacks of the Don who were part gipsy and Tatar in blood, he was ill at ease in the walls of civilization. So he had moved carefully, feeling his way.

Obeying the order of the *koshevoi*, his chief, the Don Cossack had kept a rein on his temper until now. It remained for the Cornet to anger him beyond endurance. But it was Varan who made clear what had roused the passion of the warrior.

"So the princess has a lover!" the lieutenant cried, pushing back his chair.

John of Kudak glanced fleetingly at Boris. The Cornet was an officer of the Imperial Guard, formed of the young courtiers of Russia—a picked body of cavalry, drilled by German and French veterans. He was a skilled duelist, formidable because he never lost head or temper. Quickly the governor reasoned that if Boris could kill Demid, the other meddler, Ayub, could be disposed of and the whole thing explained as the result of a duel. The Cossacks of the Siech would have no grievance against him in that case.

"A pretty stroke," muttered Boris. "It will earn you a beating from my sergeants. I will have your back flayed, Cossack, and make a dog-collar out of your skin. If you were an officer, I'd call you out, but a vagabond——"

Demid was beyond words. He acted promptly enough, slapping Boris on each cheek with the flat of his simitar. Unseen by the men about the table the girl Ileana and the Tatar servant, summoned by the orderly, had come to the door leading from the sleeping rooms. Hearing the quarrel, they stood there, half-hidden in the shadows.

Matters were going to the liking of John of Kudak, who knew the Cornet's skill with a weapon.

"Gentlemen," he said gravely, "if you must meet in my presence, let it be in order. Lieutenant Varan will act as second, to the Cornet Boris. The Cossack clown will second his comrade——"

"Health to you, excellency,[12] contradicted Ayub, who was not alarmed for Demid, "but I stand where I can see you all." And he drew the broad sword, resting his arms on the wide hand-guard.

Without further parley, Demid had thrown off his coat. He stood in a white silk shirt, wide and long of sleeve, that accentuated his slender build and the light blade in his hand.

Two spots of color glowed in the cheeks of the officer, who permitted Varan to relieve him of cloak and tunic. He rolled up the sleeve from a knotted arm and stepped away from the table, moving to

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place the light from the candles in Demid's eyes. As he left him, Varan whispered a word of advice, to stir the Cossack into blind anger, when he would lose his head and be an easy victim.

Boris nodded. He knew how to do that. Moreover his cavalry saber out-reached Demid's curved simitar by the length of a hand. He was sure of himself.

"After you have fallen to my sword, my hand will deal with the maiden of Khor," he observed, smiling.

Saluting with his blade he stepped forward.

The Cossack kept the tip of his weapon on the floor.

"To one of us life, to the other, death," he repeated the salutation of his race.

Boris, who had never faced a Cossack, was a little surprized. But he lunged at once with the point. Demid struck the saber aside, and engaged.

The two blades flashed up, slithered together, and ringed the heads of the fighters with the clang and grind of cut and parry. Boris pressed the attack, hoping to make his adversary give ground.

Demid, however, stood in his tracks, his eyes steady. Only his wrist and forearm moved. So it happened that the watchers saw the Cornet grow red in the face, while the Cossack, under the stimulus of the fight, seemed to be gripped by sheer, savage joy. His white face was composed, his narrowed eyes utterly expressionless.

"Boris is playing with him," whispered the governor to Varan.

The taciturn lieutenant shook his head slightly.

"The light simitar prevails at close work. Heavy slashes will do the trick for the Cornet. Ha!"

Shifting his ground, Boris darted in, cutting wide at the Cossack's head, and changing swiftly to the point, to try for the throat. Still Demid parried, scarcely moving his feet. The blades clanged more loudly, and Ayub began to breathe heavily, knowing that the long saber must strike home, by sheer weight, unless Demid shifted ground.

Aware of this, Boris leaped forward, slashing down as he did so. Demid had been watching his eyes, and as his arm went up the Cossack's simitar was tossed from the right to the left hand. Before Boris could turn his blade, the Cossack had drawn the edge of his weapon across the other's lower ribs, as a man might stroke a cushion with a light wand.

But the razor edge of the simitar bit deep into the Russian's flesh, and as Boris cried out, Demid slashed again with all the power of his left arm, splitting the skull beside the eyes.

The dragoon was dead before his body struck the floor, and only his fingers twitched as he lay in a spreading pool of blood. So abruptly had the ringing of the sabers ceased that the Starosta and his men stood in their tracks, staring with wide eyes. Ayub moved up impatiently.

"Well, he was no coward. Pick him up, some of you, and carry him to his tent. Why don't you send for a priest? Here—" he made the sign of the cross over the body with the great broad sword—"in the name of the Father and the Son."

Varan, his teeth gleaming, dropped the dragoon's cloak and felt for his saber, but John of Kudak shook his head. Sigismund and Hermaphron shrank from touching the remains of their friend, and the governor ordered his servant to help Varan carry out the body. This done, he handed the title deed to Khor to Demid, and tapped his snuffbox meditatively.

"You must have been born with a sword in your fist. Eh, Cossack, enter my service and you shall have a commission and half the gold that you paid for the manor house in hand again?"

Ayub glanced at his comrade and answered for him.

"We serve the *koshevoi*. Take your payment, Starosta, and leave our farm."

Hermaphron twitched the governor's sleeve.

"Excellency, already, since the raven croaked, one of our company of five lies dead. Oh, let us go far from here."

Seeing, from the corner of his eye, Sigismund edging toward the door, Hermaphron gave way to superstitious dread and sidled after the merchant like a crab moving between rocks. John of Kudak smiled.

"Cossack, if I had other men here, you should not stand at ease. You have forfeited my friendship, and from this hour I shall act against you."

He swept up the money and jewels on the table and pouched them.

"You were a fool to take up the sword."

Demid wiped his blade and sheathed it.

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"Then, excellency, Khor and its souls are mine."

"For so long as you can keep them," responded John of Kudak over his shoulder.

V

AYUB MAKES A CAMP

BETWEEN the hours of sunset and sunrise, when the gate of Kudak fortress was closed, and worthy citizens kept their beds behind locked doors, the eyes of the town were shut. But outside the wall, men moved in the darkness and watched the glimmer of lights. Nothing was to be seen along the bank of the river, yet men came together and news passed in whispers that spread up and down the Dnieper.

By the forest, the Tatar hunters, squatting patiently by the horses of the Cossacks, watched the governor's party strike its tents and move off. They bent their heads together, and clucked and chuckled. The khan of the city, they decided, was taking away his servants and slaves, and would await a more favorable chance to strike Khor with his armed warriors.

They noticed that a body was carried away between two horses, and nodded wisely. Wine had caused a quarrel among the Russians. God was one. It was all to be expected.

Suddenly they fell silent as pheasants taking cover under the shadow of a hawk. In the forest-mesh behind them a horse neighed. The moon had crept up over the river, and for a second the hunters caught sight of a man. They noticed him because he moved back from a rocky knoll when the horse neighed. They judged that he was unusually tall, and that he wore a silver helmet, because the moon glinted on it as he disappeared.

They made no sound, and talked together no more. But within five minutes, all the hunters were heading back to Khor as quickly as their squat legs would carry them. Unanimously, they had decided that the ghost was walking again, and that its vicinity was not healthy. They took the horses because they feared to be beaten if they came without them.

Along the inlet, in the marshes, the men of the fisher colony observed the torches of the Starosta going back to Kudak, and beat their hands together softly for joy. Skiffs began to slip along the bank, as the *burlaks* bore word of what had happened to their fellows. John of Kudak would have been surprized to learn how much these hidden listeners had discovered of his plans.

"The serene, great, mighty Starosta," ran the word carried along the Dnieper's bank, "has withdrawn into his castle. He pares his claws to make them sharper. He has stationed a cordon of musketeers athwart the path to Khor, and guards to watch the river. He wanted to take his retinue out of range of the Tatar arrows. Aye, the Starosta is like an eagle, an angry eagle, waiting his chance to strike down."

When this gossip had been sent on its way, the fishermen drew closer to Khor, wondering what the inmates would decide to do. If the princess fled with her two-score men, the people of the inlet must flee as well, or the soldiers would come and cut them up.

So they waited patiently to see what the princess would do. It was nearly midnight before a group of men moved down the path from the palisade to the inlet and halted on the jetty by the Khor galley. Feodor, who was with them, went to the huts of the fisher folk, and when he came back he had eight sturdy *burlaks* behind him.

Sacks of provisions were tossed into the galley, and the long oars were greased. The watermen sat down on the benches in the waist of the old-fashioned galley; a Tatar slipped forward to the figurehead at the bow; an old fishermen shipped the tiller, and a tall figure smelling strongly of vudka and leather climbed to the after-deck.

Then the moorings were cast off, and the galley slid out of the inlet toward the river silently. Feodor returned to the manor house.

"The Cossack Ayub," new gossip ran from place to place along the river, "he of the long sword, has taken out the galley. The storms have swollen the breast of Father Dnieper. He will go down the current swiftly to the cataracts, and the camp of the men below. He will seek aid for the other Cossack. Then we shall see."

Quiet reigned along the inlet, but at its mouth, as the long craft slid out and turned to drift down the bank under the shadow of the forest, a dwarf ran out nimbly, leaping

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from rock to rock until he could look into the galley of Khor as it passed over a stretch of water in the moonlight.

Then the dwarf muttered to himself, and, running back from the bank, sought out a wiry little Arab pony. Mounting the horse, he struck into the forest toward Kudak.

IN THE hall of Khor, by the fire, in the carved wooden high seat, the girl Ileana stared into the flames, chin on hand.

"You are master of Khor," she said, low-voiced, "and I am your slave. My brother is dead, and my men fear you. Even Feodor waits upon your word, for you speak his language."

When no word of answer came to her, she glanced up, under lowered lashes at the slender man whose long-sleeved white shirt gleamed near her arm. The skin of his head and throat was dark, where the blood coursed strongly. His eyes brooded. She turned back to the fire quickly, wondering why the men of the border wore a long scalp-lock, falling to their shoulders.

"You are master of the manor house, Cossack," she repeated, with a half-smile. "What orders are you pleased to give?"

"They are given, princess. Watchers are at the gate and on the palisade. Your men are counted; to each of the three tens I have given a leader, who has seen fighting, and arms from these walls. We have no powder. That is bad."

The girl lifted a slender shoulder impatiently, and drew her hand down the thick braid of hair that almost touched Demid's fingers.

"For that you slew a drunkard who would have harmed me," she said slowly, "I give you thanks, Cossack *bogatyr*. For the rest, I say that you are a fool, my Cossack savage. How long before your comrade will return with a regiment from the Siech?"

"Four days, princess—with luck."

"Ah, if Rurik the Fair were in this high seat, Khor would be greater than Kudak!" She considered the young warrior gravely. "Even you would fear the captain of the falcon-ship."

"Words are words, princess—aye, smoke from the fire of fear. Hermaphron lied to make us afraid of a ghost, so that we would leave this place."

"But the Greek himself was frightened——"

"So he lied, being a Greek. The Lord of the River is mortal."

Demid spread his hands to the hearth, ignoring the girl.

"Moreover, he must be within hearing of Kudak. There, I think, he has stored his spoil—for that is the best place. In some way he communicates with his band, quartered down the river. He is the one who slew the prince, your brother."

The head of the girl sank lower and her lip trembled.

"Michael! Ah, we of Khor are accursed." For the moment her pride left her, and the tears pressed close to her eyes. "You have bought me, *bogatyr*. Am I a worthy captive, for the first swordsman of the Siech? Will you sell me, in the Moslem bazaar on the Black Sea? Or am I too poor a thing for that?"

Disheartened, without any one to turn to for sympathy, Ileana waited for a word from the warrior. Demid said nothing. And the devil of tortured pride rose up in the heart of the girl.

"See, Cossack—" she held out, on slender arms, the braids of rich brown tresses—"are not these worth a few silver pieces? I can embroider, and read written words. Rurik the Fair taught me to polish silver armor—aye, before he forgot he had kindred and a roof and went to the Cossack wars. I can sing——"

She caught up a lute from the floor beside her, and thrust the wolfhound away from her knee.

"Show me the way,
O Lord over lords,
For I am astray
In a desert world,
Like a ship in the waste
Of a measureless sea—
Lost and alone."

When she would have gone on, Ileana's voice quavered a little, and she turned her face to the back of the high seat, to hide from the Cossack that she was crying. As before the duel, Demid's cheeks went white. Something in his high-strung spirit softened and broke. Kneeling beside Ileana, he caught up the edge of her cloak and touched it to his lips. The long tresses touched his cheek and his eyes closed. The girl, glancing down at him, did not draw away.

Her eyes sought the fire, and in them was

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something a little frightened, and perplexed and glad.

Feodor crossed the threshold soundlessly and salaamed. Then, approaching, he ventured to speak, in Tatar.

"Captain of a thousand swords, word has come to your slave from the fishermen. The cross of fire has been seen above Khor. Always, until now, it has been an omen of the taking of a ship."

When Demid made no response, Feodor hesitated and went on:

"It is in my mind that the fire is a signal, to watchers down the river. It must be kindled on the tower of Kudak, to show above the wall. My lord, shall we do nothing?"

He ventured to touch Demid's arm.

"It is in my mind that the fire appeared after the Russians went toward Kudak. Perhaps the *mirza*, the captain of the infantry, he called Varan, is the Lord of the River, and has ordered the fire signal. No man has been seen near the river so much as he. Perhaps that old fox Sigismund, for he has more spoil in his cellars than a fish has bones——"

"Cease croaking," cried Demid, "and get you to the palisade."

Old Feodor drew back, putting his hand to his forehead respectfully. His mistress' tears had dried. And the eyes of the Cossack were burning as if the warrior had been stricken by fever.

The Tatar was troubled. True, for the first time the sorrow of Ileana for her brother had lightened. But Feodor had lived long, and seen much strife, and knew how the beauty of Ileana could hold the thoughts of men.

"It were better," he confided to his comrades at the gate, who listened attentively, "if the young hero would fall drunk with wine. Then we could cast water over his head, and, perhaps, suffer a beating for it. But the Cossack would be ready for sword strokes."

"All is ordained," whispered one of the hunters, "and from this fire in the heart of the swordsman good may come. Allah is all-wise and who shall say otherwise?"

So the men in the shadows talked together, low-voiced, until a step behind them brought instant silence.

"Are ye old wives, to gabble, and the wall unwatched?" demanded a stern voice.

"Lord," spoke up one of the hunters, "Feodor is making the rounds without."

"Not so," responded Demid, "or ye would be asleep, like dogs. Shall I send the women of the house to keep your posts?"

"The forehead to you, noble sir; do not do that! We will watch, even as you say. A mole shall not creep under the ground, without our knowing it."

They scattered promptly and vanished into the darkness. Strangely enough they were pleased with what had passed. When Feodor came up again they told him what had happened, and he clucked understandingly.

"He has led men before. The Cossack has a horned soul in him. I saw him strike down a Russian with his left hand. It is well for us that this is so."

AYUB'S task was simply to get to the cataracts and the Cossack camp as swiftly as might be, and guide back to Khor a *kuren* of the men from below. Having taken internal measures against the cold, he lay down on the afterdeck, wrapped in a bearskin. But he lay on his side and his eyes scanned the Russian bank, as it sped past, in the haze of moonlight. When on the march or in the saddle, Ayub never drank, and did with a surprizingly small amount of sleep, as his foes had discovered.

But this night he was alert for any sign of the apparition, any evidence of the presence of the ghostly Lord of the River. So it happened that he was the first to see, far behind them, the speck of fire that hung over Kudak.

The *burlaks* saw it as well, and the pilot, and the pace of the galley slowed at once. The man at the tiller muttered of snags and drifting tree-trunks, but he looked more often over his shoulder.

Presently the moon left the river, the sky having clouded over. At once the watermen rested on their oars.

"Father," said the pilot, "it is vain to press on in the darkness. We would rush upon rocks or snags."

"You are afraid of the portent over Kudak," growled Ayub, "that is why your stomach turns."

Nevertheless he saw that the helmsman was right. To row down the current in that void of blackness might swamp the galley, which was a pleasure-craft and an old one. He looked about him as best he could, wondering what Demid would do, in his

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place. The Don Cossack always had a plan ready formed, when confronted by enemies. In fact, Demid had a way of beginning operations before any one else knew what he was doing.

"Father," suggested the helmsman respectfully, "we are drifting close to the right bank, where trees are near the water. We can moor the galley to the long oars, driven in the mud, for the boat lacks a keel. Under the trees we will not be visible——"

"Exactly what I had in mind." Ayub was relieved. "Make no noise."

The *burlaks*, glad of the rest, went about their work with skill and the galley was soon tied up a few rods from shore. They were preparing to snatch a little sleep when the Cossack began to swear.

"Am I a water-fowl, to roost in the river? Do you expect me to feed the fishes? Nay, we go ashore, under the willows."

The river-men murmured, and the helmsman pointed out that they were quite safe in the boat, whereas no one knew what was on shore. The galley belonged to the princess; it should not be left unmanned. Ayub, however, was ill at ease on the water. He forced the *burlaks* to wade ashore. The Tatars followed philosophically, and they all squatted uncomfortably in the damp underbrush, where the wind bit through their garments. Sleep was out of the question.

The breeze rustled the reeds in front of them; an animal splashed into the water. Overhead the long strands of the willows moved soundlessly. Ayub counted his men, told off one of the Tatars to go inland a bit, and another to watch the river.

The helmsman grumbled under his breath at the mad idea of the Cossack.

"We can make a fire," he suggested, "if your honor is chilled. Eh?"

"And you can roast your toes in ——," responded Ayub agreeably, "but you will light no fire on this accursed river, until we are within the barracks of the Siech."

By tomorrow evening, he reckoned, they should be below the cataracts. Three days must pass before he could lead a company of Cossacks into Khor. Demid had quarreled with the governor, that was all very well, but the governor could not be reached in Khor; the fortress was too strong to be carried by less than several regiments, with siege-works and cannon. The Cossacks had no powder. Moreover John of Kudak had a squadron of dragoons, and two or three hundred musketeers and pikemen, besides the townspeople, and the men of the captains who had joined him since the wars began—such as the slain Boris.

Ayub had not wanted to leave his comrade, but Demid had asked it and the man from the Don refused point-blank to leave the manor house. Nor would the princess think of quitting her home. She was a young witch and there was no telling what she might turn Demid into before the Cossacks arrived.

"Father," said one of the Tatars who had a few words of Ayub's speech, "the rushes are floating down on our boat."

Ayub cupped his hands to his eyes and stared up the river, and the hair of his head tingled. Out on the water a solid mass of bulrushes was, in fact, floating close to the shore. The moon, behind the clouds, cast a half-light in which objects on the river were barely visible.

"String your bows," he ordered the hunter. "Call the dog-brother who has gone inland. Warn the pigs of *burlaks* to be quiet."

A moment's scrutiny convinced him that the dark blur, surmounted by the stems of the reeds, was a solid body of some kind, possibly a body of earth washed from shore by the flood. But this was doubtful. In any event it was no illusion, no witchwork—and Ayub noticed with satisfaction that if his party had remained in the galley, they could not have seen the drifting mass, against the dark background of the rustling shore reeds.

The object floated down, came abreast the galley, and revealed itself as a flat body, surrounded by rushes, some twenty feet long. When it halted Ayub whispered to the Tatar to bid the hunters take cover behind trees. They had already done so. And not a *burlak* was to be made out in the shadow, although Ayub's keen ear caught faint sounds of feet shuffling back into the wood.

Suddenly his eyes narrowed. The floating island had bumped against the side of the galley, and at once dim shapes appeared amid the rushes—shapes that climbed the galley's side, with a faint jangle of steel that the Cossack knew well to be the clank of drawn weapons against shields or mail.

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"Loose your arrows," he commanded the chief of the hunters.

A strident *whirr* drowned the rustle of the wind. By the galley's side a man cried out in pain. Arrow-heads clanged against iron or thudded into wood. Some one groaned.

For a full moment the hunters worked their bows swiftly; each man had two and their quivers were well-stocked. Shouts now mingled with the moans of the injured on the floating object. In the darkness, the raiders believed for a time that the arrow storm came from the galley. Then a deep voice roared angrily.

"The shore, fools! Your matchlocks!"

Red flashes darted out of the screen of reeds, toward the willows. Powder roared and smoke gathered between the two craft and the shore. Ayub estimated that the raiders had a dozen muskets. But they were shooting at a black void, and it was the work of long minutes to reload the clumsy matchlocks. Whereas the skilled archers, accustomed to night work, scored many hits. An arrow, in darkness, could be better trained on a mark than a pistol, or the short, poorly-fashioned arquebuses.

The galley, parted from its make-shift moorings by the impact of the other boat, had drifted downstream a short distance before being caught in the rushes. By the red flashes, Ayub could make out that the other party had used a flat barge, or scow, for the attack, binding to its sides a screen of reeds. The low bulwark of the barge offered no protection to the men within it, and presently the same voice issued a second order.

"Pikes and swords, you fools.' Keep in line, and cut down all in front."

With that some fifteen men jumped from the barge into the shallow water and waded toward shore. The Tatars quickened their bow-work, and several heavy splashes told that some of the assailants had been struck down. But they were no cowards, and came on like trained soldiery. Ayub knew that his five hunters would be of little use in a hand-to-hand fight.

For a second the big Cossack hesitated. He knew the voice that gave the order—one of the Starosta's officers. His adversaries, then, were Russians. He had started the killing as a matter of course, seeing them stealing in on the galley and thinking them robbers. But he was not the man to turn back from a fight. Besides, the screen built around the barge bespoke no honest purpose.

With a whispered word to his companion, he stripped out the two-handed sword and sprang down to the stone-littered shore. Here, still within the murk under the trees, he was a foot or so above the muddy bank where the line of attackers was advancing through the reeds. His long blade whistled in the air and smote down the first two who stumbled out of the water.

"*U-ha!*" he bellowed. "A Cossack fights. Back to the fishes, you water-snakes!"

As if an echo of his war-cry, he heard from the slope above the trees a faint *U-ha!* Sheer, berserk fury gripped Ayub, when his steel thudded through cloth and leather and bones snapped under its edge. Leaping from side to side he made good his vantage point.

The light on the river was strong enough for him to be aware of the gleam of steel in the hands of his foes, and when he dodged he struck.

"From the sides!" cried the voice of the leader of the assailants. "Take him from the sides. Fail not!"

Then the *whirr* of arrows past Ayub's shoulders, and a moan in front of him. Feet pounded over the stones toward him and the Cossack made a wide sweep with his broad sword that cut the legs from under one man. Another he jammed back with the hilt. Hands clutched at his head; the butt of a musket numbed one shoulder.

Three or four foemen had him now, and strong fingers throttled his throat. Ayub jerked his head free, and struck out with one hand, while the other held fast to his sword. Unable to win clear, he strode down into the water, pulling with him the others who had not time to brace themselves against such a move. Once in the mud, he whirled like a *dervas*, felt one man fall, and another lose balance in the treacherous bottom.

A sword-stroke knocked the cap from the Cossack, but, exerting his great strength, he cast from him the assailant who gripped his head, and kicked out at the man who clung to his waist.

He was clear of them.

"*U-ha!*" he chanted, swinging his weapon again. "You came into this world when dogs scratched you out of a dung-heap. Time you went back again——"

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Steel rasped through his side and jarred against one of his ribs. Turning he parried the next thrust of the one who had struck him. Their swords clashed heavily, and Ayub thrust against a metal breast-plate. Stepping back he swung wide and knocked his adversary sprawling, losing his balance at the same time. He rolled over in the muddy water, came up, found his weapon and peered about him.

On both sides men were splashing away toward shore. Hoarse voices cried out in fear.

"Save yourselves! It is a devil we have found. Each for himself! It is a devil, come up out of the water!"

Ayub, listening in vain for a counter command from the leader, decided that the raiders had had enough, which was well as he was nearly exhausted. His Tatars, scenting victory, raised a chorus of guttural cries and loosed their arrows anew as they pursued the fleeing. Gifted with keener sight, and having the advantage of the ground, they soon cleared the shore. Silence, broken by stifled groaning from the barge, descended upon the river.

By a fire, kindled by the hunters, Ayub surveyed the fruits of his generalship and found them notable. Four badly wounded foot-soldiers and musketeers in the barge, three who had been struck down by arrows and had drowned in the shallow water, and five others, victims of his sword, crippled or dying.

"By the Cross," he muttered, "it was something of a skirmish, after all." His wounds were not serious, and only one of the hunters was slain, by a chance bullet. "Now where is the chief of these devilkins?"

A Tatar pointed to a tall figure in the livery of the Starosta, a form nearly covered by a dark, satin cloak, water-soaked. Ayub kicked it off with his toe and swore in earnest. It was Varan, his forehead scarred deep by an arrow that seemed to have stunned him, and his right shoulder pierced by another shaft.

Under instructions from the Cossack, Varan was rubbed and bound up roughly, after the water had been emptied out of his lungs. He had looked closely into the face of death, and when he recovered consciousness, lay without speaking.

"Lieutenant," said Ayub gravely, "these men of yours wear not the governor's livery. They are evil-faced hounds. What were you after when you sidled up to my galley like a fox stalking a hen-roost?"

Varan winced.

"We thought the galley another craft."

"A lie! I saw the signal fire kindled on Kudak, when I pulled down the river. You or your men saw it also, and followed us on shore and took to the barge when we made camp. You are he who is called Lord of the River, pirate and king of thieves."

The officer's long face set, and he turned away his eyes.

"If it pleases you, say it."

Ayub tugged at his mustache thoughtfully, watching his men strip spoil from the assembled bodies. "Then you are a dog, and this is what will happen to you. The Tatar arrow glanced off your skull, and so you live. But when I am done with you, lieutenant, you will journey in haste to your liege lord, Satan. So, shrive yourself by telling the truth for once. Why did you set out after me?"

"I had a score to settle." Varan looked at the stained steel of the broad-sword indifferently.

"Hm. So you carried on your work of darkness under the shadow of Kudak, protected by the governor's livery. I see now why you took such an interest in the bodies of the pirates. You wanted no dog-brothers of yours to blab your secret."

Varan nodded.

"Well, my pirate, you must have had brains in another man's skull, to guide your work and dispose of your takings, for you are not shrewd enough for that. Is it the merchant Sigismund who is your brother in wickedness?"

"I am no tale-bearer."

Ayub's eyes hardened.

"Nor am I a lady-in-waiting, my falcon. Answer, or these Tatars will flay the soles off your feet. After that we'll burn your flesh."

For a while Varan considered. Then, with a shrug, he raised himself on his elbow. "I am the chief of the band of river-thieves. As you say, another in Kudak guided our ventures and took a third of what we gleaned from the captured ships. That man was young Michael, who dwelt in the town in disguise, the while his sister thought him at Kief. We quarreled, he and I, and——"

"You strung him up with the thieves that were slain by the governor." Ayub's

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teeth gleamed under his mustache. "You are a pretty fellow. The Starosta trusted you. How did you know I was in the galley? Is it true that you can see by night as well as by day?"

The officer flushed.

"I—one of my men saw you go out of the inlet. I was in command of a detachment watching the road to Khor. By pushing our horses on the river-trail we got abreast of you."

"Another thing. What is your governor planning to do to Khor? Will he pass over the affront or start a battle with Demid?"

"John of Kudak is angered." Varan chose his words with care. "He is minded to take Khor, keep the princess shut up from her people, in the fortress. If you want to bargain for Demid's life, you can say to the Starosta that you have taken the Lord of the River. He, at least, will give me an easy death—and he would exchange me for the young Cossack. But you have no time to lose."

Doubtfully, Ayub studied him, but Varan's eyes were steadfast.

"I have talked enough. Do what you will."

Just then there came one of the hunters with tidings.

"Father, the *burlaks* are gone."

"How, gone?"

"They are not here. We have searched the woods. The thickets are dense and the ground impassable. They could not have gone far. But we hear them not."

"The —— take them!" Ayub glanced up at the stars, noting by the Dipper that the hour was close to dawn. "Well, we will take to the galley, with our prisoners."

The lined face of the hunter twisted curiously.

"The galley is gone."

Ayub got to his feet and went to the shore, even walking some distance downstream. Yet the boat, that had been stranded within sight, was not to be seen. He inspected the barge, but abandoned that in contempt. It lacked oars or rudder, and leaked freely.

Sunrise showed him the long stretch of the river, and not a boat to be seen. For several hours he waited impatiently, but except for a single fishing-smack that kept obstinately to the other shore, the Dnieper was bare. Reflection brought him little comfort. He might wait for days before a serviceable vessel came within hailing distance. Varan had sent back his horses to Kudak, and between them and Khor, thirty miles north, was not so much as a hamlet. To push on to the Siech on foot was out of the question. Neither Ayub nor the Tatars were cut out for walking, being bred to horses.

"It is plain," he grumbled, "that God never ordained me to be a ship's captain. It was an evil hour when I left my black stallion and took to planks on the water. Now we must tramp like slaves for a hundred *versts*, to reach Demid again with this prince of robbers."

Leaving, perforce, the crippled and dying thieves, to drift down-river in the barge, he took Varan and the one slightly wounded captive, and set out toward the river-trail in no pleasant frame of mind. The sight of the Tatars, stumbling through the brush in their heeled riding-boots, brought him some comfort. To lift his spirits and cheer his men he began to sing heartily.

"When you are back from the wars, my lad,
When you are back from the wars,
Your dog will be dead,
Your wife will be fled
With a fat pursed alderman."

VI

THE MAN IN THE CLOAK

AYUB'S one thought was to get back to Demid. His *kunak* had been bewitched by a young girl. To be sure, Ayub had decided that the princess, Ileana, was not a vampire; but he believed she might be a basilisk—a thing with inhuman eyes that drained the courage from a man.

It was quite clear that some power, some agency unknown to the Cossacks was at work upon the river. Ayub had caught Varan at his evil trade of plundering and slaying; still, immediately after that the galley had vanished. Moreover the big warrior had heard a shout from the forest mocking his own war-cry. Along with the galley the watermen had disappeared to the last man.

Ayub did not wait to reason it out. The galley might have drifted clear from the rushes, certainly, but—unmanned—it could never have floated out of sight before sunrise. Nor would the *burlaks* have fled from

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his fire. He had no desire to match wits with a devil.

Demid would know what to do with Varan.

On the second day of the march, luck favored the Cossack for the first time. A boy horse-herd of Khor overtook them a few miles south of the manor house with half a dozen ponies—a round-up of the stragglers before the Winter set in.

Mounted, after a fashion, they made better progress, and by mid-afternoon arrived at the forest edge near the spot where the Cossacks had watched the farm. Leaving his men on the trail, Ayub climbed to the knoll to have a look around before venturing out into the fields.

Well for him that he did so. It was a warm afternoon—one of those that come long after Summer, when the sky is dark, but the slanting sun once more repels the clouds, and no wind stirs the bare limbs of the trees or the brittle leaves on the earth.

The blue haze did not conceal a half-squadron of dragoons, dismounted a quarter-mile from the forest, in the pastures behind Khor. Nor the videttes sitting their horses a gunshot from each flank of the line of cavalry. By their plumed helmets, and fur-tipped, blue cloaks, Ayub knew that this was the detachment of the dead Cornet, Boris.

They had taken position in the open, where they could cut off any attempt at flight by those in Khor.

In front of the manor house and its palisade an earthwork had been thrown up, with fascines through which projected the mouths of two brass cannon. Behind this line stood the banner bearing the arms of John of Kudak. The steel caps of musketeers—a company of Walloon mercenaries—were visible over the breastwork.

On each flank were compact masses of dull-clad footmen, sailors and peasants of the town, armed with pikes and flails. Ayub estimated them to number a hundred, the musketeers a score, with as many officers and their servants. With the three-score dragoons this made close to two hundred men under the command of John of Kudak.

"Enough to draw and quarter every soul in Khor thrice over," thought the Cossack.

The governor knew what he was about; his forces were well-placed, and by mustering the townspeople, he had been able to leave the better half of his soldiers in Kudak, to keep the fortress while he was away.

"And Demid sticks a feather in his nest, the young fool!"

Ayub swore feelingly; at the same time his eye gleamed and he stroked his mustache with a grunt of pleasure. Over the gate of the palisade, facing the cannon, a rude standard had been placed, a pole bearing the wide horns of a steer from which hung buffalo tails—the *buntchuk*, or standard of the frontier Cossacks.

Except for this there was no sign of human occupancy in the manor house. No men moved in the stables, the hay-ricks or the rambling wings of the manor house. Devoutly, the Cossack prayed that Demid had been wise enough to withdraw before the farm was invested. If he was within, with Ileana, the hand of John of Kudak would not deal with them gently.

One of the mounted nobles rode around the breastwork and approached the closed gate cautiously. Evidently he sought a parley, but returned to his post without receiving any response. A group of the nobles walked to a slight rise, overlooking the field, and a long plume of black and white smoke rolled from the muzzle of a cannon. A roaring report was followed by another.

Ayub spurred back to his followers, and began to lead them along the edge of the forest, to the brush nearest the gate of Khor. At intervals the cannon barked, and they could hear the splintering of wood where the logs of the gate were being pounded to pieces.

When they gained the point they sought, within arrow-shot of the footmen at one side of the earthwork, Ayub dismounted and peered through the screen of brush. The cannon of the governor had made short work of the wooden gate. It lay on the ground, a heap of logs. Ayub could see through the gap into the palisade, and he thought he made out figures moving through the smoke pall.

An officer rode up to the musketeers. The cannon were swabbed out and moved to one side. The musketeers took up their pieces and formed in a double file, ready to move against the gate. On each side the town militia formed for an advance. Ayub could see the Starosta now, mounted beside the captain of the German infantry. Out in the distant pastures, the dragoons were climbing into saddle leisurely, drawing their

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sabers, laughing and cracking jokes about this castle of straw that they were going to take.

John of Kudak lifted his hand, to give a command. Then, without speaking, he turned his head. Several of the militia men near Ayub glanced around curiously. The Cossack was aware of singing.

It came from below and behind the line of the governor's men. It was a deep-throated chant, barely audible. Seeking a new position in his screen of underbrush, Ayub peered down at the inlet.

Up the neck of water from the river to Khor a galley was coming, rowed by long oars. He recognized the song as the chant of the Dnieper rivermen. And he recognized the galley as the ancient craft that had been under his feet not long ago.

But in the stern of the galley, a hand on the tiller, stood a tall figure, hatless and gray-haired. At least the scalp-lock that hung down one shoulder was gray, the sun-blackened skull otherwise was shaved in the Cossack fashion. An immense red *svitza* was flung over the bare chest of the man of the galley. This was bound tight at the waist with a green sash, and high boots completed the attire. At the side of this man stood a short Cossack with only one arm.

By now every one in the Starosta's force was staring at the galley and its crew. Ayub reflected that these *burlaks* were the same that had rowed him down the river. But then they had had no song on their lips.

A murmur from the townspeople reached his ears, as the galley slid in to its jetty and the watermen flung up their oars.

"Rurik! It is the *bogatyr*, the hero. Rurik the Fair!"

"It is the master of Khor, come back after ten years——"

"Nay, dolts, 'tis the ghost of Rurik—he was not buried. See, he has only one eye, and his familiar, beside him, has but one arm. They are ghosts!"

So ran the talk of the watchers, voiced by those nearest the jetty, and repeated further back until Ayub heard. The big Cossack crossed himself and felt for the hilt of his sword, because his back was cold and his hair tingled. But, presently, remembering that ghosts never walked in sunlight, he peered forth again.

Will-he, nill-he, the Starosta was forced to postpone his attack, what with the rising apprehension of the town militia, and the appearance of Cossacks at his rear. He waited impatiently, while the two men stepped from the galley to the jetty and began to walk up the slope. The servants, who stood nearest, gave ground before them precipitantly. His own retinue opened a wide lane for the newcomers.

They advanced with a heavy tread toward the governor. And by degrees the men of Kudak quieted their superstitious dread. These strangers were human beings.

Ayub blinked and scratched his head. By now he knew the two men—the *koshevoi* of his camp, head of the Siech, and the veteran who had lost his arm in the last battle with the Moslems.

But why had the people of Kudak spoken the name of Rurik?

TWO paces from the governor's horse the old Cossack in the crimson *svitza* halted. His one eye flickered about him, taking in the banner of the Starosta, the demolished gate of Khor, and the soldiery. This eye was curiously light, steel-gray. Those were present who found it disconcerting. John of Kudak gathered up his reins impatiently.

"What man are you? What do you seek?"

The eye of the Cossack fixed on the Starosta and he seemed to reflect.

"I am the chief of all the Cossacks."

He held up an ivory baton, tipped with gold.

"I am the *koshevoi*, and I have come for powder."

"At an ill time, you have come. I have work to do, for the Crown. Later—this evening—*koshevoi*, I will talk with you."

The Cossack pointed with his baton at kegs of powder, standing by the cannon. "My men must have plenty of powder, Starosta. The red cock* is loose on the border. The forces of the Grand Turk are stepping over the frontier, from the Black Sea. They are taking slaves from the Christian villages."

"That is your affair. Mine is to keep Kudak fortified."

The *koshevoi* considered this and shook his head. "The last tsar, Boris Goudunov, gave his word that my children, the Cossacks, should be supplied with means to

* Fire.

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fight the Moslems. If they rub out the Christians below the Wilderness this Winter, with the first grass the janisseries of the Crescent will be masters of Poland and Kiev and Moscow. I came with one man because my *kurens* are all on the line of battle. My word is enough—for you. Give the powder."

The long chin of the governor thrust out, and his cheeks reddened. But before he could answer, Ayub pushed through the throng around him, with Varan at his side. The wrists of the lieutenant were bound, and he was weaponless.

"By the saints!" cried the governor, "what is this, Varan?"

Ayub spoke to the *koshevoi*.

"Father, we have dragged the Lord of the River out of the river—aye and emptied a bellyful of water out of him to boot. This captive is the leader of the pirates, and he can tell where the Cossacks' powder is hidden."

Those in the retinue of the governor stared at Ayub and his prisoner in complete amazement, only the merchant, Sigismund, fingered his lip and his eyes hardened as if he were casting the lots for a great stake.

Varan smiled.

"Lies, excellency—as you know. This vagabond attacked me when I was patrolling the river below Khor, and slew most of my men. He is a savage, and to escape torture at his hand, I told him the first tale that came into my head."

"If you lied," growled Ayub, putting his hand on his sword-hilt, "your deeds spoke otherwise. If your men were not thieves, I'm a monk."

John of Kudak let fall the reins of his horse and frowned. Among the *mujiks* and sailors of Kudak a sudden impulse of anger burst into words. They hated and feared the pirates, these men of the town. Every merchant had lost goods at their hands, and every river-man had kindred slain. And their anger was directed against Varan.

At first it was merely a gust of temper that passed through the watchers. They did not know Ayub, nor did they greatly care whether he lied or not; but Varan, the lieutenant of the governor had been harsh. He had put honest people in the stocks for venturing near the rafts on which the bodies of slain criminals floated down the river; he had given peasants to the rack and the bastinado for failure to pay the fire-tax; and no one knew what business he had been about, lurking along the banks of the Dnieper. It rejoiced them to see Varan bound, and if he were, truly, in league with the pirates, the townspeople would like to tear him to pieces with their hands.

They did not dare to speak openly, for the Starosta was lord of their souls and property. But John of Kudak was aware of their anger, and he let fall the reins of his horse, placing his hands on his belt.

"Lieutenant Varan," his clear voice rang out, "I gave no order to hold up the Cossacks' boat. Your place was here, at Khor, with your men. Too often have you gone pilfering. I have kept your reckoning."

The face of Varan changed, and his mouth hardened. The swagger fell away from him.

"Excellency, a word with you, apart from these cattle——"

"Serene, mighty governor," broke in Sigismund significantly, "it is time I spoke." He hesitated, and as John of Kudak gave assent by silence, went on with more assurance. "This officer brought to my house of business, certain goods taken from the river-traders. He asked a price for his wares, first swearing me to secrecy. But if he is working with the pirates——"

"Excellency," cried one of the *burlaks* who had come up from the galley, "grant me life, if I add my word. This officer sent men to our village, to take from us the silver we gleaned from our last catch of sturgeon, sold in Kief——"

"He shot down my son, saying that the lad was spying upon him——"

"If he is the Lord of the River——"

"He sold my girl to the Moslems, pretending that such was the law, when my hut was bare of aught to pay the tithes he demanded in your name, O most worthy Starosta!"

As if the growing rage of the people were a storm arisen in a clear sky, Varan seemed shaken. His eyes wavered and he tried to throw himself on his knees, to touch the governor's hand.

"Silence!" cried John of Kudak, rising in his stirrups. "No man of mine can play the criminal and wear my livery. Lieutenant Varan, I release you from my service!"

His hands rose from his waist, and in each of them gleamed a long pistol drawn from

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his belt. Thrusting forward the iron barrels, almost into the white face of the officer he pulled the triggers. Smoke swirled many feet behind Varan, and through the white cloud his body was seen to whirl about and fall to the earth, with both eyes shot out and its skull shattered.

So suddenly had Varan died that the onlookers were taken by surprize. They watched, without a word, while the Starosta quietly wiped from his fingers the powder-stains from the priming-pans of the pistols. A moment more and the captain of the German mercenaries muttered something by way of warning.

Then was heard the tread of horses on the grass outside the breastwork.

"A dog would not do that."

This was Demid. The young Cossack had approached from the gate of Khor unnoticed in the excitement except by the musketeers. These last, perceiving that his sword was in its sheath and that beside him rode the princess Ileana, had permitted him to pass between their files.

Now he reined in beside Ayub, while Ileana edged her pony to one side, her eyes searching the crowd of men.

"So, my cockerel," observed John of Kudak, "you have come to give yourself up!"

"I came, Starosta, to make report to my chief. And the princess, to welcome him to Khor." Demid glanced down at the body of Varan, the bound hands clasped convulsively. "As God lives, that was a coward's act. Varan served you well, and kept faith with you. Since you have slain him I will say what perchance you feared his lips would tell."

He glanced at the *koshevoi* who stood a little apart, leaning on his baton. The chieftain nodded. John of Kudak studied the Cossacks with lifted brows, and, instead of answering, handed his pistols to a servant to charge and prime.

"Father," said Demid to his commander, "on the river we met with a float wherein were hung many bodies. These were branded pirates, condemned by the Starosta. Yet their faces, twisted in death, did not bear the look of desperate men. One was a young noble, Prince Michael of Khor. Dying, he gave me a word for the princess, that he should be avenged."

Again the *koshevoi* nodded.

"We searched the bank of the Dnieper," went on the warrior, "and there was not a trace of the river-thieves, save the rumor of a light shown in Kudak tower before a vessel was attacked. Nor did any of the crews survive, to tell how they were beset."

He turned swiftly on the throng of townsmen that pressed close to his horse.

"O blind fools. The Lord of the River kept his secret under the seal of death. He disappeared from the river, because he walked among you openly; he had eyes to see in the dark because his spies watched for him. When he took a ship, he cut down its crew, and thereafter placed their bodies on the rafts that drifted down the river. Upon the float he put the legend, 'These are river-thieves.'"

Demid gathered up the reins of his pony in his left hand, his right rested on a fold in his girdle near the simitar hilt.

"So was it with Prince Michael. Journeying down the river from Kief, with money, his galley was attacked and taken, the young prince plundered and stripped, within the castle of Kudak."

"Have you proof of this, Cossack?" demanded Sigismund.

"The trail of a snake across the road is proof of the passing of the snake, merchant. How otherwise could the pirates vanish, and the bodies of the crews be found in their place? The thieves came from the castle of Kudak, and acted the part of the river-guard. They were soldiers. Proof? The powder of the Siech was taken, and I can lead you to where it is hidden."

The merchant began to tremble, in the grip of bodily fear. "*Ai-a*, then will we know the truth. For it was I who bought the powder, during a journey to Kief, and embarked it on the river. The kegs were all marked with my sign—three circles painted on the bottom, where they are not readily seen. My Armenians—I am of that race — brought the shipment safely to Kudak. Then——"

"It grieves me," said John of Kudak reluctantly, "that Varan should have done this thing."

"And it grieves me, excellency," responded Demid slowly, "that it was by your command he did it. You are the Lord of the River."

John of Kudak laughed, in his black beard.

"I am appointed Starosta of the lower

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Dnieper, so, perhaps, I am its lord. For the rest, you are mad."

At this point the deep voice of Ayub boomed out.

"By whose command were honest people kept from sight of the faces of the dead souls on the floats?" he demanded. "And, by the ——'s lap-dog, whose pistols slew Varan?"

Sheer amazement held the dozen men of the governor's retinue silent. The Germans looked on impassively, with loaded weapons; the people of the town gaped and stared, uncertain what to believe. It was then that Ileana spoke, a woman breaking into the conference of men—a thing unheard of.

"The men from below have found out the truth. Aye, my lord of Kudak, they have uncovered your sin. If you had not turned your hand against Khor and its souls, they would not have known it. To hide your tracks you accused my brother, who was without sin. For that you will be called to answer."

She paused and looked at him steadily.

Sight of the girl, sitting her horse without fear, before armed soldiers had its effect on the townspeople. Some began to draw near her, others to stare hostilely at the men-at-arms. If that were the truth!

"To whom, child," smiled John of Kudak, "shall I answer? I am your overlord, and these accusations are no more than the gabble of masterless men."

Pride glinted in the eyes of the girl. "Rurik, the *bogatyr*, my grandsire, did not die at the hands of the Moslems. He stands among us."

She pointed to where the old *koshevoi* had been. He was not there now. While she sought for him in the crowd, a fearful howling set up near the cannon. Taut nerves quivered and men swore feelingly as they turned about.

Hermaphron had absented himself from the lines when the assault was formed. Discreetly, he had gone far off. His curiosity aroused by the gathering, and the sight of Ileana, he had drawn nearer. Startled by what he heard, he had lingered in the safest spot he could find, among the stalwart legs of the musketeers.

When Ileana mentioned the name of Rurik, the relic-seller glanced about apprehensively. What he beheld behind him made him cry out.

"It has come back. Protect me, excellencies! It has sought me out!"

His pudgy finger pointed toward the cannon. There stood the gray-haired *koshevoi*, as it happened, his blind side nearest the Greek.

"His eyes are put out, yet he searches for me. By ——, *he is carrying the cask with which he was drowned!*"

In fact the Cossack chief had taken advantage of the general excitement to walk to the powder-kegs, one of which he had lifted to scan its under side. No mark of any kind was visible, but the sight of him so had recalled to Hermaphron the legend of how the Turks had taken the hero from the water with a wine-cask in his grasp.

Nor was the effect of Hermaphron's words less potent upon the *koshevoi*. Letting fall the keg, he strode to the Greek and seized his hair in one powerful hand, whipping out his saber with the other. Placing the edge against the Greek's beard, he roared in anger:

"Dog, and traitor! In years agone you betrayed my ship to the Turks, and my heroes looked on Mother Death. Aye, the Moslems took me before I quit this life, and tortured my limbs. One of my eyes they put out, but the other can see. Where are my *kunaks* — where their Cossack swords?"

His one eye gleamed with a fierce satisfaction, and sweat dripped from the plump chin of the Greek.

"Serene, great, munificent lord!" he chattered. "Father of forgiveness——"

The sharp edge of the sword moved and his beard fell to the earth. Hermaphron shrieked.

"I will serve you! Mighty Rurik, I will confess——"

"You played the spy again," snarled the old man. "Upon the prince, my grandson. He was strung up like a slave!"

"I will s—" Overmastering terror swept everything from the mind of Hermaphron but the steel at his throat. "John of Kudak is the Lord of the River——"

The words ended in a whistling choke. The right arm of Rurik pushed forward — forward and sidewise—and the sword-blade passed through the throat of the Greek, gritted through his spine. Lifting the severed head high the *koshevoi* hurled it at the governor.

"Death to you, John of Kudak!"

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VII

THE RED SUNSET OF KHOR

IN A second the deadlock was broken, the calm of the governor gave place to swift action. Sure of his power and the inability of his accusers to bring home their charges, until now, the Starosta heard swords drawn on every hand. He knew that a fight to the end must follow, between himself and Rurik.

He held the balance of strength, in weapons and men. Startling as the reappearance of the hero in his home had been, after ten years of following the wars in the Siech, when in Khor and Kudak he had been given up as dead, Rurik had only his three Cossacks at hand. John of Kudak was not slow to act.

Snatching his pistols from the servant, he wheeled his horse to take aim at the *koshevoi*. His agile mind formed plans instantly.

With Rurik and his warriors slain, Khor could be taken by his trained soldiery who were indifferent to such matters as extortion and piracy. The townspeople, once the issue was decided in his favor, would stand in fear of him. He had no overlord to call him to account. He would, in truth, be master of the river, until such time as he was pleased to quit the district with his gains, and go to Moscow.

He brought his weapons to bear on Rurik. But Demid, urging his pony forward, threw himself against the governor. The Starosta's horse stumbled and reared. His pistols flashed harmlessly.

"Musketeers, in line!" he cried. "Shoot me these dogs!"

The German captain repeated the order, and the slow-moving mercenaries began to form shoulder to shoulder, and place the rests for their arquebuses in front of them. Meanwhile other things happened.

Ileana had been working her way toward her grandfather. Coming to Rurik's side she dismounted swiftly and tendered him the reins. Thrusting her toward the breastwork, the Cossack leaped into the saddle. Ayub had whistled up his hunters, who put their short swords into play among the governor's following. These being servants and officials fled the ground with all speed.

This brought the four Cossacks—for the one-armed Colonel was not slow to pull a man from a horse and join the fray—and the Tatars headlong into the half-formed ranks of the musketeers.

Before a shot was fired from the arquebuses—before, in fact the fuses were lighted—the horsemen were wielding their swords. The mercenaries dropped their clumsy firelocks and drew their hangers. But they were disordered, dismayed by the sudden onset of the riders, and they faced in the Cossacks expert swordsmen who asked not, nor gave mercy.

The Germans were veterans of the Flanders fields, disciplined men, and good soldiers, as they proved later in the Thirty Years War. They fought doggedly, rallying around the governor because he was their master by virtue of money paid and received.

"Pull them from their horses!" shouted John of Kudak. "Use your steel on the ponies!"

The musketeers did, in fact, drag down the one-armed Cossack, and run him through with their blades. It did little good. The three Cossacks at the head of the Tatars fought with the reckless abandon of their race, and they kept their horses in motion. Ayub's long sword cleared a wide space about him, while Demid's lighter simitar whirled around and over the short blades of the Germans like a thing alive.

Half the mercenaries lay on the ground, while only two of the hunters had fallen. Seeing the fight going against him, John of Kudak jerked around his horse's head and raced through the opening in the breastwork, while the Cossacks were at the other end of the struggling throng of men.

He galloped clear, to meet the youthful ensign of the dragoons who had come up, leaving his squadron in charge of a sergeant, to ask for orders. The Starosta kept on, until the two riders gained the line of the waiting cavalry. So short and deadly had been the struggle at the guns that the dragoons only fancied the governor's men were fighting among themselves.

Now John of Kudak bade the ensign form his squadron in double ranks, and to move on the breastwork.

Meanwhile the flight of the governor caused the captain of the musketeers to throw down his sword and cry a truce. Rurik assumed command of the situation at once.

"Bind them, dog-brothers!" he shouted at the townsmen. "Take their swords."

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Until now the peasants and militia had hung back from the struggle which had been wolf-like for their wits. The order of the *koshevoi* was agreeable. Having secured the Germans hastily, and snatched up their weapons it was natural that they should look to him for another command. Rurik had counted on this. Standing up in his stirrups, he let his voice out.

"Who are honest men—let them man the *labor*. Who are cowards—let them leave their weapons and draw back to the water."

No one was willing to discard his weapon and leave his comrades. Sight of the old hero roused their enthusiasm: they had no love for John of Kudak. Sigismund it was who sealed their determination to fight with the Cossacks.

"Stand your ground, comrades," he cried, his sallow cheeks flushing. "We will take Rurik for our overlord, and strike out for our goods and families."

A shout of assent answered him, and the townsmen crowded up to the breastwork in disorder, waving pikes, flails and the captured swords. Rurik and Demid surveyed them without approval, and exchanged glances. Here were more than a hundred followers, but the experienced Cossacks doubted whether the throng would stand the charge of the cavalry.

"Where are Ileana's men?" growled the *koshevoi*. "And where is Ileana?"

Demid pointed out the figure of the girl, running toward the open gate of Khor. It was too late to go after her; and there was no time to throw the throng of *mujiks* into the palisade. The dragoons, already at a trot, were nearing the wall of the manor, between which and the wood they must pass to get at the earthwork.

Ileana passed through the gate, and the Cossacks turned grimly to their task. Ayub climbed up on the fascines and swung his broad sword around his head.

"*U-ha!* Pikes over the breastwork, lads, swords in the rear. Watch the flanks. Say a prayer to the Father and Son, for this will be a red night."

In truth, at that moment, the sun set over the plain of Khor, and the whole sky was a crimson panoply. For years thereafter the people of the town spoke of it as the red sunset of Khor.

Until the dragoons came abreast the palisade and perforce, swung in close to the wooden wall, there was no sign of Feodor and his hunters. But when the ensign lifted his saber and the riders spurred to a gallop, a flight of arrows sped through the dusk. Black heads appeared along the top of the palisade and the short bows of the hunters twanged incessantly.

Half-seen by the dragoons, the sudden storm of shafts wrought confusion in their order. A half-dozen men and horses rolled on the ground; a score of injured beasts reared and plunged in the ranks. Those on the end nearest the wall tried to change front, to draw away from the archers. Orders from the ensign and the Starosta clashed.

The dragoons lost momentum; riders, gazing about for their leaders, fell under the steady whistle of the arrows. John of Kudak raced to the front of the disarray.

"To Kudak!" he shouted. "Each for himself."

With that he turned sharp to the left, and passed midway between the manor house and the trench. The dragoons strung out after him, the best mounted taking the lead. Only the ensign, writhing under the discomfiture of his troop, kept a dozen together, to hold the rear.

"Judas!" bellowed Ayub, brandishing his sword impotently on the breastwork. "So that's the way you fight, with the heels of your ponies! Come back, serene, great mighty lord of the Styx and Starosta of ——'s cess-pool!"

The thudding of hoofs alone answered him—that and the hooting of the peasantry, at the flight of John of Kudak. But the *koshevoi* swore heartily. In Kudak castle, if Demid were correct in his belief, was the great store of powder that the Cossacks had come for, and in the barracks of Kudak were pikemen and soldiery of the governor enough to keep the walls against an army.

Once within the gate, John of Kudak could overawe the inhabitants, and make good his stronghold.

Rurik stood up in his stirrups.

"Where is Demid? We must muster what riders we can and follow through the wood. Where is that unbranded ——, Demid?"

The Don Cossack had left the trench, and no one had seen him go.

Taking one of the hunters with him as a guide, Demid had started for the forest as soon as the governor turned his horse. The dragoons were on the main trail, and

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the Cossack and the Tatar kept to cattle-paths. Dusk deepened under the trees and they bent low in the saddle, pushing through brush and trees at the best pace of their ponies.

Sometimes near and sometimes far, they heard the shouting and clash of weapons where Rurik pursued the rear of the dragoons with the hunters from Khor.

Demid wasted no thought on anything but the path ahead of him, that twisted and veered off in maddening fashion. With only a mile to go, he began to stroke his horse with the whip and then to flog it.

They passed the huts of peasants, galloped over a bridge, splashed through a stream and turned into the hamlet outside the gate.

Reining in sharply as the wall came into view, Demid made out that the Starosta had just pulled up outside the gate with some dozen dragoons at his heels. Moreover, the gate was closed and locked.

It was one of the vagaries of fate that kept John of Kudak from the sanctuary of his castle that evening. By his order the gate was locked always at sunset, and the sun had been down a half-hour. He fell to pounding on the iron-bound logs, shouting hoarsely.

The guards who climbed to the watch-tower and peered down into the dusk at this sweating and dusty man did not at first recognize the governor. Even when he proclaimed himself profanely to them, and the sound of conflict drew nearer along the main trail, the men on the wall hesitated, such was their dread of breaking one of his commands.

Then they climbed down and began to lower the bars.

It was nearly dark, and when Demid trotted out of the shadows between the huts, he was not noticed until he drew near John of Kudak. Many of the cavalry were riding up, intent on the tumult behind them. But when Demid rose in his stirrups and spurred toward the governor, a shout went up and swords were lifted.

The dragoons were scattered in groups about the trail and the Cossack turned and twisted forward, sliding away from some, parrying the cuts of others. Each turn he made took him nearer John of Kudak.

"Strike him down!" urged the governor. "A hundred ducats to the man who slashes him."

Demid came on in silence, slid from one side of his saddle to the other, shifted his simitar from left hand to right. So, by mastery of his horse and quick work with his blade he reached the horse of the governor.

"Fend him off!" the man cried, pulling back to the gate itself. "Body of——"

He cut down frantically with his saber, and felt himself parried. Demid leaned forward and his arm shot out. Steel gritted against bone, and the outcry of the governor ceased.

Demid drew erect with an effort, turned in his saddle and caught in his left hand the arm, raised to strike, of the man nearest him. This was the ensign who had just come up.

"Your master is dead," the Cossack said. "Will you serve a slain thief or a Russian prince? Sheath your swords. I will take your surrender."

The ensign was cut up over the loss of half his men; all the *boyars* of Kudak were dead—Boris and Varan, and the attendants of the governor. In the darkness, he did not know how many men Demid had at his heels.

"Terms—my men?" he asked, panting.

"Fair service—your squadron kept as it is—tell Rurik I pledged it."

Demid's arm drooped and the boy instinctively held him up. Not until the gate was opened and torches flared did the ensign see that he held in his arms a man so slashed and cut as to be utterly helpless. But by then Rurik and his hunters had come up, and the dragoons sheathed their swords.

After a short parley the captains of the Russian pikemen followed the example of the dragoons. Lacking leaders, they had nothing to gain by holding out. Moreover Rurik had a way with him. He summoned a priest and called his men to prayers after candles had been lighted before the ikons, after the Cossack fashion.

First seeing that Demid was cared for and put to bed in the officers' quarters and a physician summoned, he called for the castellan, took the keys of the magazines and led the others down into stores of Kudak. There they found powder enough to equip an army for a campaign, bales of silk, and nankeen, captured weapons of all sorts, perfumes and fine leathers, and cotton—in short the plunder of a score of vessels.

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Even Sigismund and the under-officers of Kudak were astonished at the wealth gathered by John of Kudak, for in trunks in his rooms were sacks of gold and boxes of jewels, pearls from Persia, rubies and emeralds and carved ivory from China.

That night was long remembered in Khor. The Cossack chief had all of the spoil except the gold, the weapons and powder—including the kegs that had been shipped from Kief to the camp, and were found, marked, under the other casks—carried to the dining-hall of the castle. Hither he summoned the citizens of the town, and greeted them. Then he announced that he hungered and a banquet was prepared in the kitchens.

"Beat the drums, light the flare on the castle tower. Summon the minstrels of the town with their fiddles, and the *bandura* players to tell their tales. This is a dull place, by Saint Nicholas. It was otherwise in my youth. Eh, we will have a frolic."

He shouted for Ayub.

"No more ships will be lost on the Dnieper. Tell the townspeople that. Bid the *mujiks* and the merchants to come to the courtyard, and the fisher-folk, and the men of Khor. We of Khor are masters of Kudak castle."

The doors were thrown open and candles lighted in every hall, corridor and shrine. The squeaking of fiddles and the songs of men were heard as the throngs from the town pressed into the castle.

In the courtyard the Cossacks took their stand by the bales of goods, and bundles of precious things hoarded by John of Kudak. First the servants of Khor were given rich gifts of ivory and leather, then the peasants were tossed silver and rolls of silk. Bearded *mujiks* stared agape at the glittering spoil poured into their hands.

Rurik the Fair, goblet in hand, towered over the as emblage. Ayub, adorned with a silver helmet and a peacock feather, glittering in a mandarin's coat, was enjoying himself mightily.

"Here, *kunaks*," he bellowed to the astonished serfs, "is your head-tax for the rest of your besotted lives."

He threw into the air a double handful of ducats.

"Here's the horn-tax! There goes the river-toll."

He kicked loose a bale of goods.

"—— take me, I've forgotten the tithes," and he delved into a casket of pearls. These he presented to the children who had come to gaze at the feast.

"What a waste!" moaned Sigismund. "They are like pigs in a trough, these men from below."

The young ensign, considerably heartened by the turn in his affairs—Rurik had appointed him castellan, and captain of the troops—looked up in displeasure.

"Hardly pigs," he muttered. "At all events, they can fight. How came the old *koshevoi* here?"

Sigismund told him.

"Rurik was leading a scouting-party behind the Cossack lines, when he beheld on the river the float of the men slain by the St— by the thieving John of Kudak. The fisher-folk who knew him then told him of the body of his grandson, Prince Michael. When he looked into the face of his grandson, he came up the river to search out those who had slain the boy. That was why he abode near Khor secretly, and talked with the *burlaks*. He followed the party of Varan, and was present at the fight for the galley. Seeing his boat abandoned, he took possession of it, and whistled up the *burlaks* to row him to Khor, when the one-armed Cossack came to him from the Siech with news of the Turks' advance. Truly the croak of a raven is an omen of evil——"

The merchant shivered a little, remembering that of the company that had sat about the table of John of Kudak two nights ago he alone survived.

He drew back, seeing that Rurik had climbed to a table and lifted his baton. In his other hand the *koshevoi* held a great drinking-cup.

"To the Faith," he roared, "of all true men in the world."

"To the Faith!" repeated Ayub, not too steadily.

The *koshevoi* lowered his cup and wiped his mustache.

"To the mistress of castle and manor, the princess, Ileana. Until such time as there is a new tsar, you will serve the maid of Khor. Do you agree?"

"Father, we agree!" cried the peasants. And the merchants and officers added their word, because the young girl was greatly loved.

"Fail not to keep faith with her," added the *koshevoi* grimly, "unless you wish to

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summon up Demid and his sword from below. And with Demid will come ten thousand swords from the Siech. Do you hear?"

"We hear!" cried the listeners, and drank the health of the princess.

The fiddlers took up their bows again, and the *bandura* players began their song. Out in the courtyard the peasants began to dance, as if it had been a feast-day. The men-at-arms gathered about the wine-casks, and teased the prettier girls. The castle servants, glad to be spared their lives, flew about bearing laden platters.

"Faster!" ordered Ayub, pounding on the table. "Play faster. Eh, you have forgotten how to frolic. What a world! The Cossacks come to visit you for a night or two and you don't even take off your coats to dance. When I was young it was otherwise. Look at this!"

Casting his broad sword at Sigismund to hold, he took the center of the hall, squatted on his heels and leaped high into the air, shouting the while. His silk coat swung around his shoulders, splitting down the middle and he flung it underfoot. The elder minstrels began to tap with their feet on the floor. Their eyes sparkled. They had seen warriors frolic like this in other days, before going to the frontier.

The gloom and the fear fell away from those in Kudak, and the hearts of the people were merry.

In the chamber of the Starosta, where the clamoring of the fiddles and guitars came faintly, the girl Ileana sat by a couch on which the wounded Demid lay, shielding the light of a candle from his eyes. From time to time she rose to change a bandage, or to urge him to drink of the potions left by the physician. Her glance went frequently to a tall clock ticking noisily by the candle, marking the hours of happiness left her.

Her hand was light upon the youth's forehead, and a flush was in her cheeks when his eyes met hers. A song crooned in her throat until he slept, and then Ileana knelt by the couch, her head against the covers and cried a little, knowing that before long when the wine cleared from the head of her grandfather, the *koshevoi* would be impatient to be off again. So she treasured up the short hours that kept Demid at her side, and not for the pearls or the silks that Ayub had scattered in the castle would she have exchanged one of them.

Once, in the second day of the feasting, she ventured to speak to Rurik.

"His hurts are many. Why can he not abide in the castle until he is hale and strong?"

"Not Demid," responded the *koshevoi*. "His skin is scratched a little. But the *kunaks*, his comrades will be waiting for him, down below. There is work to be done. Would you have him grow fat, like an ox, and sleep on the stove?"

Looking keenly at his grand-daughter, he patted her head.

"Eh, so you have given your heart to the *bogatyr?* Well, then you must hold your head high. You know the path that lies before the men of Khor."

Ileana sighed. Rurik stepped to the edge of the battlements, looking out to where the vessel into which the powder of the Siech had been loaded was waiting for his command to cast off from the jetty. His eye traveled over the gray stretch of the Dneiper, cold and wind-swept.

"Little Ileana, much water has passed down the Dnieper since I sat in the high seat of Khor. My companions have gone their ways, each to the end of his road. Mother Death has beckoned me many times, and I shall not ride through the gate of Khor again. But no Turkish prison, and no chains will keep Demid from coming back. That is well, for you should have a husband whose sword will safeguard you. He is an eagle, looking down at men from afar; he must fly through the spaces of the world, and match his strength against his foes."

The *koshevoi* placed his hand under the girl's chin, and looked long into her eyes.

"What message shall I bear from the princess of Khor to the *bogatyr?*"

Ileana hid her face against the Cossack's shoulder.

"Say to Demid that when the wars are over, a fire will be kindled in the tower of the castle to light his way."

"Good!" The eye of the chieftain gleamed with pride and satisfaction. "Now it is time for us to go, who have the road before us."

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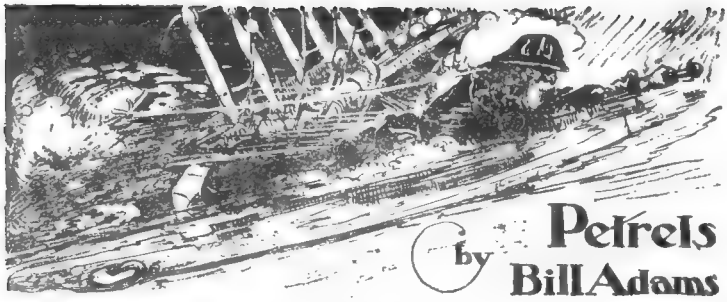

Author of "Aftermath," "The Lure," etc.

Associated Press dispatch, June 28th, 1922:

NEW YORK—The master of an incoming vessel reports sighting a four-foot model of a full-rigged ship, sailing steadily along about seven hundred miles west of the Irish coast.

A FULL-RIGGED ship, the sunset lights upon her, sailed northerly across the warm Sargasso Sea; that sea an upheaved waste, darkly indigo and running in high ridges before a sou'west wind. Clouds sped above her as under full sail she urged the waters from her bow and tossed them, in broken cataracts, aside. Astern, above her whirled wake, their cries faint on the wind, petrels flew.

At her wheel stood a heavy-set, square-shouldered sailor whose searching eyes looked forth from beneath grizzled brows. Beside this helmsman stood a lad, a tall sea apprentice, who, a rag of canvas in one hand, a little can containing powdered chalk in the other, was engaged in polishing the brass binnacle in front of the wheel.

The helmsman stared away, toward the nor'ard and westerly, and, catching the apprentice's eye, murmured a few words. The apprentice, turning, stared whither the helmsman stared.

"She's got her old rags on," he said, and added, "What if we're caught?"

In the chart-house, beyond the cabin skylight, visible through a port, was the ship's clock. The helmsman, looking at it, spoke.

"Four bells, son—strike!" he said; and his young companion, grasping the lanyard of a brass bell upon the skylight, struck the bell sharply four times.

Taking his chalk-can and rags, the apprentice left the poop. He paused upon the quarterdeck to stare at the darkening seas beyond the weather railing and in a moment was joined there by the helmsman.

The wind was falling, the evening drawing in. The sea, no longer running in high ridges, seemed uncertain in which direction to run; as though unguided, undriven, by any determined wind. The sound of the water alongside was become, in a few moments, quite changed.

From the poop the second mate stared to the skysail mast-head above him; then, turning, gazed toward the windward sea in the south and westerly. Eager for the appearance of the mate or skipper, who sat at supper in the saloon below, he tramped impatiently forth and back along the break of the poop, waiting to be relieved and to sate his hunger. To the horizon in the north and west, whither the apprentice and the helmsman now gazed so fixedly, he paid no heed.

His voice low, lest the officer above hear his words, the sailor spoke.

"It'll catch her, son," he said. "I've sailed these seas a-many times. There's weather brewing in the nor'ard. Good that there'll be a moon."

"Grub, Manus!" exclaimed the apprentice. "Come on! Maybe we'll be called on deck before we've time to eat."

They walked forward together till, coming to the midship house, the apprentice entered the half-deck. The sailor continued his way toward the forecastle.

As the apprentice entered the half-deck

"*Petrels*," *copyright* 1923, *by B. M. Adams.*

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door a lad who, seated at the little table, broke sea-biscuit into a pannikin of coffee, looked up.

He was a sturdy, large-handed lad of short stature. His eyes were brown. His dense black hair, standing erect, encircled a sea-tanned forehead. His features, though somewhat heavy, and to the casual observer coarse, wore the constant suggestion of a breaking smile.

"What's kept you, Petrel?" he asked.

"Shift o' wind coming. It's going to blow," replied the other.

"I'll soon be where I sha'nt care whether the wind shifts or not," answered the lad at the table, and added, "It's steam for me."

"I'll stay in sail till I'm a master," replied his shipmate.

"By then you'll find you'll not be able to get into steam. They'll not give you a job. You'll be too far behind the times with your old-fashioned sailing-ship ways," laughed the lad at the table.

"I'll be a sailor. That's what I came to sea for," smiled his comrade.

"When sail passes from the sea where'll you be?" asked the other as, rising, he looked through the open port.

"Wind's fallen, hasn't it?" he asked.

"It's going to blow from nor'west. Manus says so," answered the tall apprentice.

"Manus is wise. He ought to be a skipper," said the dark-haired lad, smiling.

"He wouldn't be—not if he had the chance," came the quick reply.

"You and old Manus are a pair!" cried the other, looking down at his shipmate. now busy at a poor supper of hardtack and coffee.

"I believe you'd sooner go aloft to reef a frozen topsail than be the skipper, snug in his cabin below," he added.

The tall apprentice, his meal finished, arose and, reaching a large glass jar from a locker, placed it on the table.

He was a lean and sun-browned boy of twenty years, blue-eyed and yellow-haired, with a slowness of speech and of movement like the deep slowness of an unchanging tide of the sea. Despite his sun-tanned complexion there was in his face a suggested frailty; an absent look in his blue eyes as though, himself perhaps unconscious that he did so, he dreamed of far-off things.

"Look! Aren't they wonderful?" he said, gazing into the jar, within which, amidst a cluster of amber weed, crawled many minute and bright-colored creatures of that warm sea.

His companion laughed.

"When you're in steam you'll have no time to watch the wonders of the sea. You'll have ceased to belong," said the tall apprentice.

The short lad, placing an arm about his shipmate's shoulder, gazed into the jar.

"You wouldn't really rather be in steam, would you?" the tall lad asked.

His comrade's brown eyes glowed; lips and eyes alike each brightened by a smile.

"We're both petrels, old man," he said, and, gazing through the open port beside them, added, "but they'll clip our wings, and we'll be tamed. Sail will soon have passed from the sea."

The tall apprentice returned the jar to the locker; and, tossing off their clothes, they prepared to roll for a time into their bunks.

From the deck without there rang a quick command. Naked as day the tall lad ran through the door; his comrade, stripped to the waist, at his heels.

MANUS meanwhile had entered the the forecastle, where the men of his watch were already finishing their evening meal. Unnoticed by them, he took a seat at the after end of the room, and, withdrawing a hunk of salt pork from the mess-kid upon the table, ate rapidly. A sailor at his side turned toward him.

"Hurryin' to th' model?" he asked.

Manus, taking his pannikin from his lips, nodded assent.

"Wot'll ye be doin' wi' yer model w'en ye git 'er done?" asked an old man, rising from the table.

Manus made no reply, but, his meal finished, went to his bunk and brought from it the model of a sailing-ship's hull.

"It'll take ye many a v'yage if ye're goin' to build her as big as that," said one.

"I've see'd men as'd spend all their dog watches for years an' years a-workin' on a model," said another.

"Ye'll be w'iter nor me w'en ye gits her done," said the old man.

Manus looked long through an open port; then, lifting the model from the table where he had placed her, returned her to his bunk.

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Four men with playing-cards in their hands were taking their seats at the table.

A moan, as of a high wind far away, sounded faint from without, and at the same instant the chief mate's order rang—

"*All hands on deck!*"

The card-players dropped their cards, and all ran to the deck.

Night had fallen, and the deck was gloomed.

The ship, her canvas flapping, lurched in the troughs of a listless sea. There was no wind. Darkness was becoming momentarily intenser, though a gleam low on the horizon gave evidence that the moon would soon arise.

A second order rang upon the ominous silence—

"*Stand by!*"

Men, indistinct in the deepening gloom, their voices clear on a mysterious silence, hastened to sheets and halyards. A sailor, bare-footed, striking his foot against a ring-bolt, swore as the iron clinked. Some one laughed.

From the poop a hard voice cried—

"*Watch your helm!*"

And the helmsman's voice replied—

"*Steady, sir.*"

There came a rush of wind, an outcry that swept beneath the hidden clouds. The sea became, in that moment, uproarious. The ship, trembling to the onslaught, lay over. Yards and spars cried aloud, while sailors, obeying orders but half-heard, ran swift along the deck.

There fell an instant's lull, and a defiant laugh rang the deck's length. As that laugh was borne away, to be heard perhaps upon some far-off sea, the moon arose, breaking, sudden, through glooms of the horizon. The sea was molten, of silver and of indigo, lighted with lights that incessantly shifted. White water raced along the railing-tops as the storm broke overhead. In that storm's lash, fury and loveliness, as though created for each other, now commingled. Radiance overspread all things. The ship, golden moonlight upon her, lay tremulous upon a chaotic sea where but a moment before had been calm inexpressible.

"*Aloft and pick them up!*"

At that order men of an agility unbelievable leaped to the rigging, to race, ape-like, snake-like, according to each sailor's personality, to doomed, and to already destroyed, sails.

For a space the voice of man was unheard.

Sail after sail, torn to shreds, blew in long ribbons on the wind.

In a flood of light, upflung from the horizon by a fast-rising moon, men hastened to the mast-heads.

With a snarl that seemed in part a sound of anger and yet in part a sound of mirth the mainsail blew from its bolt-ropes.

There fell another lull, and a sailor, far aloft, laughed; while another, waist naked upon a spar below him, waved a clenched fist at storm and at laughter alike.

The wind drove down anew. The sea swept the deck. Spray, hurled high between her masts, gave to the ship the appearance of a tall tree grown at a waterfall's white-misted foot. She seemed a lovely growth, a delicate and fronded fern, mistily growing in that windy moon-gold; broken, but with power to arise anew.

Sailors, some clothed and some half-clothed, descended from one mast to hasten aloft upon another.

The moon-lit sea became continually more marvellous; the storm-wind seeming as though upbreathed from the very ocean's heart.

High in the main rigging, his white skin and back-tossed yellow hair ashine, stood the tall apprentice, bare as on the midnight of his birth.

Sailors, ascending from the deck, sped by him, till one, a short, a heavy-set and leaping fellow, stayed a moment at his side.

The sailor, embracing a wide arc of the scintillant universe, waved an arm.

"*The seal!*" he shouted into the ear of the naked lad, who shone like a white blossom upon a tree in the wet mist of waterfalls.

The apprentice laughed, a shrill laugh, happy on the night.

A cloud obscured the moon. No voice was heard. The light returned, and night passed on with song and shouting.

From racked spars they gathered in the ribbons of her sail-cloth. On the boom, where pennants flew above a leaping sea, sailors labored while the bow wash thundered below them.

The ship, her yards stripped bare, lay to the blast.

On deck, half-hidden in the warm Sargasso waters, men whose feet slipped upon inwashed clusters of brightly berried weed strove for footing; their faces now uplifted

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to gaze at the weather, now bowed to escape the smiting of the spray.

Suddenly a light twinkled will-o'-the-wisp-like on the deck, and "Chips," the carpenter, carrying a bright-red lantern, hurried forward, followed by a line of crouching sailors whose trivial figures appeared like light-pursuing animalculæ of night. The sea alternately hid and disclosed them. Their eyes gleamed. The young men laughed and shouted. An aged waist-naked fellow, clinging momentarily to a hand-rail with the full moon upon him, was garlanded about bare shoulders by a cluster of the amber weed—Sargasso weed, prettily berried, and uptossed to garland a sailor—flung to one of her children by his mother, the sea.

In the abyss of night the ship, her graceful yards, her half-hidden decks and the forms and faces of her company, shone all sea-glorious.

Chips, leading the way, disappeared beneath the forecastle head. He opened the sail-locker hatch, and, the sailors following him and his red lantern, passed to tenebrous depths below.

In murkiness beneath the level of the roaring sea the lantern cast shadows goblin-like upon them while they sought new canvas for her wind-raped spars. For each spar whence the wind had torn a sail they dragged forth new canvas.

Dust of the hold settled thick upon them. Beads of perspiration dripped to runlets upon their faces. Their eyes shone, beady, in ringlets of black. Wrestling, now in the lantern-light, now in the shadows, they lifted long rolls of sail-cloth to their sinewed shoulders, and so, enclasping it in hairy arms, staggered to the decks above.

A sailor leaped from the deck's smother into the shrouds and, a gantline block lashed about his shoulders, climbed, now slow, now swift, foot by foot and ratline by ratline, toward the topmast head.

The tall apprentice, a rope lashed about him, his head level with the sailor's heels, followed aloft. The yellow rope, uncoiling from the deck to pursue him upon his upward way, appeared in the mist and in the wet moon-gold like a sinuous and persistent serpent arising from the rumble of the waves below—a serpent trained to obey each motion of its master; its master a man, nakedly fearless, at home in his sea Eden.

Rope and sailor swaying, the block-bearer swaying, they battled to the mast-head, their heads alternately bowed and uplifted, watched by comrades who, from the deck and from the lower rigging, gesticulated to them and to each other and shouted encouragements unheard.

Having attained to the summits of their windy desires, they returned to the deck, where those who had watched them seized half-savagely upon the rope's end and deftly made fast thereto a sail.

The wave-crests continually sweeping upon them, burying them waist deep and swirling about their firm-braced legs and feet, they strung along the deck to windward, and thus, rousing an old chantey, they sang defiance to the frantic sea and all of her mad majesties.

Their bodies, rhythmical as were the songs they lifted, swung forth and back. Their chests heaving, they stretched forth their arms, and with knotted sinews and expanded ribs, hauled the new topsail to its appointed place at the sky-raking mast-head far above them.

The gale, yelling, defiant, round the top-sail, fluttered it far. The sailors made mock of gale and sea alike.

The ship tossed, waiting patiently.

The sail aloft, they followed it thither, each man racing to outdo his comrade. A hundred feet above the caldron sea they swarmed along the rocking spar and shouted and sang and laughed, and, having bent that topsail to its jackstay, returned to the deck to send aloft another—and so throughout the night.

When pallor overspread the eastern sea-rim the tall apprentice, two hundred feet above the sea, lashed robands in a new main skysail. At his side toiled the square-shouldered sailor, who, the robands all fast and the sail ready to set, rose upright on the foot-rope and rested a huge hand upon the shoulder of the naked lad beside him.

Thus together they gazed toward the breaking of the day.

Suddenly, waving an arm, the sailor encircled an arc of the watery waste.

"*The seal! The seal!*" he shouted.

The apprentice's lips moved. Though with the close of that long night his young body was now grown chill, his wide eyes shone.

"Ours, Manus!" he cried.

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The moon paled. The stars paled. The ship, tremulous and beautiful, was become the day star of the sea. Men's cheery songs rose all about her. Lengths of yellow rope trailed in white waters beside her.

Petrels, their cries faint on the wind, circled her wake.

MANY years passed. The winds above the warm Sargasso Sea blew throughout those years, unchanging; now soft, now loud; now in still darks of night, now under gale-blown stars. Still the amber seaweeds tossed along the ridges. Still stormy petrels flew, hovering in now widening, now narrowing, circles above indigo waters.

The sailing-roads of mid-ocean, uncharted and unmarked, no longer trailed by keels of many questing ships, were abandoned now to gull and whale and wind; to sky lights and to sea darknesses. Where in former years ships had wandered, tacking sea patiently, beating into head winds or biding the utterness of calms, there now lay sulfurous above the horizons, trails of dark smoke. Steamers hastened by, waiting on no wind, heeding no current; destroying with churning propellers sea-beauties beneath their wallowing feet.

Alone upon those wastes, equally a part of the sea with the lights and shadows upon it, crept the last clippers, their canvas as much a part of the watery world, as, also wind-hovered 'twixt the clouds and sea, were the spread wings of the lonely gull. Sighted by men upon the decks of steamers, they were stared at by those men curiously, as in past years their own sea-roving companies had stared to watch the spouting of the whale.

"Yon's one o' they old wind-jammers," a deck-hand would say in the dog watch as canvas, flashed against the crimson of the sunset, rose from a purple sea. Then the steamer hands would gather in the bow to watch a clipper pass—fantom-like, dim against the wakening stars.

UPON an evening when at fading of sunset stars were awakening, a steamer, shoving the waters from her squat bow, passed northerly along the edge of the Sargasso Sea. From her bridge the mate, a short and dark-haired man of near to middle age, stared with unseeing eyes across the waters ahead. From the distant expression in his eyes it was evident that he saw in the fading daylight the seas or shores of some well-remembered vision.

A breeze, light from sou'west, ruffled long rollers.

A bell clanged; and the helmsman, an aged and white-whiskered sailor, relieved at the wheel, walked slowly forward.

Save for the wash about the advancing steamer and the dull reverberations of her engines there was no sound.

Presently, while the mate yet gazed over the darkening seas ahead, a voice cried from the bows, where, motionless, with his eyes upon the rim of the sea, the lookout man stood.

Men from the forecastles below him immediately crowded to the deck.

Under the awakening stars there flashed, now white as the sea-crests, now tinted rosy by the western sky, a speck so small as to be all but invisible upon the northern horizon. That speck rose and retired again, now lifted high to a swell, now lost in the hollows.

The steamer hands ascended to the forecastle head and crowded into the bow; foremost amongst them the old helmsman.

"Jake," queried a lad whose gaze was fixed upon the far-off sail, "you was in them style ships, wasn't you?"

The old man, turning, stared for a moment at the rusted funnel whence a cloud of smoke and cinders floated down the wind, hiding the stars away. Then with a slow stare he looked her tub-like length along, and spat into the sea.

The sunset faded. The stars possessed the night. At the stumpy mast-head of the tramp a wan light gleamed—a dying star, pallid and perplexed beneath the scintillant dome above.

The men upon the forecastle head, no longer able to discern the sail, returned below to their quarters.

"Jake," said one of them, "sing us one o' they old sailin' chanteys."

"Aye, sing us a chantey, Jake!" cried another.

The old man, seated upon a sea-chest the handles of which, after the fashioning of a by-gone day, were made of rope grummets, looked about him, a look half-patience, half-desire upon his face.

"Come on now, Jake, an' sing us one o'

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they old chanteys," said a stoker, wiping the sweat and coal-dust from his lean shoulders.

The old man looked from side to side of the rust-ribbed forecastle; then, rising, stepped to an open port and spat into the sea. Speechless, he passed to the deck, and again ascended to the forecastle head.

The lookout man, seeing him arise, pointed into the gloom ahead, where, winking upon an indiscernible sea, there glimmered now and again a light.

Gradually the pyramidal canvas of the sailing-ship became outlined against the dark dome of the night.

On the steamer's bridge, at a word from the skipper, the mate opened a signal locker and, lighting a flare, held it high over the sea toward the sailing-vessel. A greenish glow lit the rolling funnel of the tramp, and the cindery smoke-trail, blowing overhead, shone upon the dazzled faces of the mate and skipper.

The bark, beyond the radius of the flame, was momentarily hidden from the blinded eyes of those upon the steamer's bridge; then, bark and steamer bow to bow and parallel upon the sea, an answering flame broke out, and each lay illumined in the pale flame.

The stars were extinguished. The sea was become a void. The steamer loomed, a huge, slow-motioned creature with breath and sides that trembled as from pain within. The lower canvas of the sailing-vessel shone, phantasmal, lovely as the wings of some home-flying bird. Now dipping as the sea dipped, now lifted to the swells, she dallied—as a free creature, at home and in her chosen element.

The flares died. The mystic sea was lit with phosphorus. Night, no longer indiscernible, became a magical field of hidden flowers, above which a wind sighed. The lights of the bark passed astern, and commingling with the sea-lights, faded away. Night grew intenser. Clouds hid the stars. A swell arose, long and uneasy, to hint of winds approaching from afar.

The steamer, her wan light the lone star of the night, rolled steadily northward.

ON THE forecastle head of the bark a man walked to and fro, keeping lookout. Watching the lights of the steamer fade away, he watched also the wide sea-circle ahead. Half-hourly, bells broke musical across the sea, telling the watch away. When eight bells rang clear from poop to forecastle head the lookout man stayed his walk to cry, his hands cupped at his bearded lips—

"All's well, sir, and the lights are bright."

Then, relieved by one of his comrades, he walked aft to report again from the quarterdeck.

The mate, his contented voice careless, grunted a reply; then as the old sailor started forward bent toward him.

"Manus!" he called.

The old man, stopping, looked into the darkness above.

"Go take a look at the skipper," said the mate.

Manus passed beneath the break of the poop, and opening an alleyway door, stepped into the saloon. Striking a match, he held it high before him and thus made toward a door upon the starboard side. When the match went out he bent to listen at the keyhole; then, hearing no sound, softly entered.

A gimbal-hung lamp, turned low, dimly illumined the little cabin. Through an open port the cool night breeze blew in. Overhead, inverted above the skipper's pillow that he might see at any time of day or night upon what course his vessel sailed, hung a telltale compass. The unadorned bulkheads were white, the ceiling white, the white-scoured deck-planks bare.

Upon a narrow bed but little wider than a bunk lay a man who in silence motioned to the sailor to approach.

His long, fair hair hung all about his forehead, adding by its brightness to the pallor of his face. His blue eyes shone like lights that, stolen from a morning sky, now trembled in the nearness of extinguishment.

His hands upon his booted knees, his wrinkled countenance brown above that sunken face, the old man gazed speechless into his skipper's eyes.

After a silence, during which each seemed to search the face of the other, the skipper's lips moved, and Manus bent close to catch the whispered words.

His voice deep as the sound of ice fragments breaking from a melting berg, he made reply.

"She's nigh finished, sir."

The skipper turned to a clock upon the bulkhead beside him; then, smiling, spoke again.

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"Go below, Manus," he said.

The old man made no reply.

The skipper's eyes shone. He lay unutterably still; the sailor above him equally still; the great repose of weakness meeting the great repose of strength, as, when brother meets brother, each knows the other's heart.

Presently, his words scarcely audible, the skipper spoke again.

"Remember that night?"

The old man nodded.

"They'll need you if it blows," the skipper whispered, his wide eyes wandering as though he watched the edges of a field of dreams.

"Good canvas is all she's got that's good," he whispered again after a long silence.

The old man made no reply, seeming to listen to a wind that whimpered far beyond the port.

"Go below," said the skipper.

For a moment the sailor remained motionless; then stared quickly through the open port, turned and was gone.

He passed from saloon to quarterdeck and made his way to the forecastle.

In the forecastle a lamp turned low threw dim shadows on the still forms of sailors in their bunks. Manus turned the lamp higher. No one stirred. Taking a seat upon a chest at the after end of the forecastle, he bent to gaze at the lovely model of a full-rigged ship that rested in chocks upon a bench between the table and the after bulkhead. Reaching backward, he turned the lamp yet higher, and a sailor, startled to wakefulness by the light upon his face, leaped from his bunk to the deck, and while yet but half-awake groped for his clothing.

"All right, son; turn in," said the old man, looking up at him.

Others, awakening at the sound of voices, bestirred themselves.

"What is it?" asked one.

" 'T ain't eight bells yet so soon again, is it?" another asked.

"It's old Manus with his model," said a third.

The man on the deck lit his pipe and returned to his bunk.

"Where ye been, old barnacle?" he asked of Manus.

"Why didn't ye come forrard wi' the rest of us?" asked another.

"Finish yer model an' set her sailin'," said a young sailor.

"What kept ye, Manus?" asked the smoker.

"I was with the old man," said Manus.

"Is he better yet?" asked the young sailor.

"No, nor never will be," replied another.

"He's low, boys," said Manus, his deft fingers busy in the model's skysail rigging.

"Ye'll finish her tonight?" asked the smoker.

Manus placed the model upon the table. She was about four feet long, her spars almost touching the deck above her. Her standing rigging was taut, her running rigging rove, her canvas set. Her rails and spars and houses shone.

"What'll ye name her?" asked the smoker from his bunk.

"They don't build no such ships today," said one.

"No, nor never will again," said the smoker, and blew a cloud of white smoke all about her; so that she looked like a ship in a mist.

Manus began to trace the letters of her name on her bow in silver paint.

"*Petrel*, eh?" said one.

"You can't cage them birds," said the smoker.

There was a call from the deck without.

"Wind's comin'," said one.

Manus finished his painting.

From deck, mingling with the complaint of gear, came the voices of the other watch, who braced the yards in.

The smoker stuffed his pipe under his pillow.

"Better be gettin' a doss, boys," he said.

They rolled over, and, turning their faces from the light, pulled blankets about their chins.

Manus returned the model to her place upon the bench; then, removing neither seaboots nor oilskins, crawled into his bunk.

On deck the watch cried out upon the ropes, while the rumble of the sea increased.

AT MIDNIGHT the mate descended to the skipper's room.

As he turned the lamp high and looked at the figure on the bed the skipper rose with an effort upon his elbow, but fell exhausted back.

"The weather?" he whispered.

"Fair, sir—barometer falling," said the mate.

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"If it rises the wind'll haul to nor'west. Don't get caught," whispered the skipper.

He lay very still, seeming to listen to the hurry of the sea beyond the port.

"Full sail?" he asked presently.

"Everything set, sir," replied the mate, and continued: "If this lasts she'll make Queenstown in nine or ten days. You'll be all right then, sir."

"Anything I can do for you, sir?" he added after a silence.

The skipper closed his eyes.

"Good night, sir," said the mate, and passed from the cabin, leaving the lamp high.

He went to the chart-room and stared at the barometer.

The second mate joined him there.

"It's steady," said the mate. "She'll hold a sou'west wind."

The wheel and lookout were relieved, the watches changed again.

"Keep handy the watch," called the mate, taking charge of the bridge.

The bark flew.

THE watch went forward, beneath the forecastle head, to smoke their pipes while waiting on the weather. Manus, entering the forecastle alone, sat down beside his model. The fond work of many a dog watch through many a year, he studied her closely from the point of her dolphin striker to her main skysail truck. Each brace-block, each rigging seizing, each ring-bolt upon her curving deck painted, and her brass and teak work shining, she was a very perfect little ship. By and by the old man arose and, lifting her from her place upon the bench, bore her away through the door to the deck's darkness. The wind piped shrilly in the shrouds above him. No star shone as, the model in his arms, he walked aft, keeping well beneath the shelter of the weather rails.

He opened the alleyway door beneath the break of the poop and, feeling his way with slow and careful feet, made directly for the skipper's cabin.

As he opened the cabin door the lamp, bright on bare bulkheads and on the figure outstretched upon the narrow bed, twinkled on his little ship, and lit up her dainty white canvas.

He placed her upon the deck and went to stand above the sleeping skipper. Outside the port the wind cried by, and the skipper, awakening as a comber crashed below the uplifted counter, half-rose upon an elbow and looked at the old man.

"The sea, sir—the sea," said Manus.

Minutes passed in silence.

A light, flashing suddenly upon the sea without the port, illumined the old sailor's face. The skipper lay motionless, seeming to sleep, while from the poop above flare answered to flare.

Manus, peering through the port, saw the wan light at the steamer's mast-head twinkle and fade astern as the bark sped swift-footed down the rising wind.

A brass bell, its tones faintly borne to the cabin, clanged the half-hours away. Manus sat upon the deck beside his model. Presently his head nodded, and he too slept.

The middle watch passed on.

When eight bells was made again the mates stood before the barometer.

"Wind's falling, sir," said the second, and, their eyes meeting, the mate nodded.

"Rising a bit," he said, his gaze upon the instrument.

"Told the old man?" asked the second.

"I'll drive her for Queenstown," said the mate.

"Shall I keep full sail on her, sir?" asked the second.

The mate nodded assent and went below.

It was that drear time before the awakening dawn when darkness is most desolate. Far in the south and west chill stars gleamed, feeble in a ragged sky.

The second mate walked to and fro. The young helmsman, stamping his feet, beat his hands upon the wheel-spokes. The bark, lurching uneasily, slatted her canvas on spar and shroud. The wind now fallen to an air, the sea lapped undeterminedly.

In the cabin below, old Manus, his white beard upon his oilskinned breast, nodded in his sleep. The skipper, his eyes upon the telltale compass, watched while the bark, off her course, drifted to the ocean currents. Presently he whispered to the old man, who leaped up and bent over him.

"Tell—them—to—shorten—sail!"

Manus hurried from the cabin.

As he stepped to the poop-deck a blast beat upon him, and spray smote his face. The second mate, his voice drowned in sudden savagery from nor'ard and westerly, shouted an order. The mate, awakened by the wind's roaring, raced forward, the

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second at his side, each unaware of the other's proximity, and each bellowing to the sailors.

The sailors ran from the forecastle, and, bent into the wind or stumbling before it, made toward halyards and clew-lines.

The bark quivered. Sprays swept her fore and aft. Men, shouting impotently, ran hither and yon. From the wind's heart above came a long grind of ripping backstays, a scream of twisted wire and, louder than either, the harsh sound of splintering timbers.

The main topmast, thundering down, lay amidships and athwart the bulwarks. The fore topmast fell, hampering about the bow.

While she lay, forced down by the wind and the weight of her wreckage, the main topmast slid outboard to lee and, taking the bulwarks with it, left a gap that yawned from fore royal backstays to main shrouds. The satisfied sea, hurling itself through that gap, ravaged an unprotected deck.

A second squall smote the bark. A comber, high-lifted before it, topped the weather rail, and, having swept the fore decks, returned to the sea; bearing with it, choked and helpless, the broken bodies of the mate and five sailors.

Two sailors, remaining, crouched below the weather rail and awaited doom.

The second mate called in vain. Only the tempest heard him, and none other gave reply. Presently, thinking he heard a smothered cry, he ran from his shelter beneath the 'midship house and, seeking the caller, unaware of the great gap that yawned in the lee railing, was instantly gone forever to the sea.

At the first onslaught of the gale Manus had gone to the wheel, to find it abandoned and kicking to the blows of the waves against the rudder. The bark made no reply to his hands upon the spokes, and he at once descended again to the cabin.

The skipper, his shoulders propped against the bulkhead, lay upon the deck.

Manus, kneeling, gathered him in his oilskinned arms and, the yellow head resting against his shoulder, the bare feet dangling helplessly, bore him to the chart-room and laid him gently down upon the settee.

Beyond the chart-room door the sea roared defiance to a momentarily increasing tempest.

The skipper, his eyes on the old sailor's face, tried in vain to speak, and Manus, watching his colorless lips, nodded a sudden assent and was immediately gone to the deck.

He stood a while at the head of the poop ladder and harkened to the storm, then passed down to the quarterdeck. In the impenetrable darkness cataracts swirled waist high about him. Clinging to bolts and backstays and biding his chances, he advanced in short rushes. As the bark, rising to a ridge, in part freed her decks of their torment he ran for the after end of the 'midship house and ere the angry sea returned to seek him was safe within the door; the door slammed to behind him.

In the darkness of the locker-room he drew long breaths, and, fumbling within his oilskins, sought and found dry matches. In another moment a lantern, swung to a beam above, shone on his dripping oilskins. Then as though seeking some definite thing he flung ship's gear from hastily opened lockers, till chafing-mats and sennit, spun-yarn and hawse-line, lay all about his feet. He threaded a sail-needle and thrust it into his sou'wester brim; then seized a long canvas sack and, taking the lantern down, knelt to read the faded letters upon three iron tanks that stood against the bulkhead.

"Raw oil," he read, and passed to the next.

When he came to the third tank he opened the faucet full, thrusting the sack beneath it.

In a moment he stepped once more into the waist-deep sea. One hand grasping the lanyard of an oil-sack, the other firm about the house rail, he battled his slow way forward, and, keeping instinctively amidships, came presently to the forward end of the house. There for a space he bided his time and at length, thinking he sensed the approach of a lull, leaped forward.

At the very instant that he left the hand-rail a comber, topping the rail, engulfed him, and he slipped and fell face downward on the deck. Deep in the sea, he was swept fast to leeward. The lanyard of the oil-sack, entangled about a fife-rail stanchion, held him for one brief moment; and, checked in the smothering waters, he felt at that moment an iron ring-bolt bruise his knee. Instantly his clawing fingers closed on the iron and held. The wrench of his hand-hold all but tore his arm from its socket as with the oil-sack now dragging upon his other shoulder he fought to lift his head above the waters.

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When for a moment they receded his breath came—a gasping, great sob that was choked to a desperate gurgle as the sea once more rolled over him. Water filled his sea-boots, which, thus filled, wrenched at his legs. His hold was fast growing feeble. Though weakened by the added weight upon his feet he strove to kick and, so striving, was helped by that very weight that would have defeated him. His boots, torn from his feet, were instantly swept through the gap that yawned not six feet from him.

He struggled to his feet, and, dragging the sack by its lanyard, half-ran, half-staggered to the forecastle head and ascended the ladder. He knelt upon the forecastle head, crouching backward upon his heels with the sack held firmly between his knees, and thus with the roping-needle from his sou'wester brim jabbed hole after hole in the stiff canvas. When, having lashed the lanyard fast to a stanchion, he had hurled the leaking sack of seal-oil into the weltering sea, he rested a while ere he again descended to the main deck.

Freed of his burden, he returned in safety to the oil locker, the wreck already riding more easily upon an oil-smoothed sea. Within the locker he dropped to his knees and thus sought and found the wooden scupper-plugs and knocked them free. The water from without gurgled through the open holes. He opened the outer door and lashed it wide—that the sea might enter the locker-room. Then, having turned the faucet of each oil-tank full on, he returned to the open deck, an ax in his hand.

Dawn was breaking. The bark rode easily upon the oil-streaked sea, while beyond the oily track down which she drifted rain, falling in torrents, drove the outer sea-crests down. Her broken topmasts stood ragged against a dark, low-hanging sky. Fragments of the boats, wind-beaten, clattered against the skids and davits. A tangle of wire and canvas, spar and cordage, hung about her to leeward. Of all her sails only the foresail and fore lower topsail, which alternately filled and flattened as she veered unguided to the swing of the combers, remained intact.

Manus went to the chart-house and looked in upon the skipper. The skipper lay with his eyes closed, and, ax in hand, the old man returned to the deck once more, and, his footing precarious upon an oily though less sea-swept deck, hastened to the cutting of her wreckage.

As screw-box by screw-box, backstay by backstay, rope by rope, he hewed away the hapless tangle that but a few short hours before had been a gracious symmetry, his figure loomed primordial in the driving rain.

When at length the bark lay freed of the wreck of her top hamper gray day was wide above the water wastes. The rain had thinned, the wind fallen somewhat away. Masses of low cloud and slanting walls of rain, passing ahead and astern, spoke of the dying angers of the night.

Manus, his labors accomplished, returned to the chart-room, and, pausing but a moment to gaze at the face of the sleeping skipper, passed down the companion ladder to the saloon.

The cabin lamp had burned out, and the little room lay chill in the drear light of dawn. Water, upflung through the port, slapped forth and back upon the deck. Manus closed the port; then, bending above his model, lifted her and bore her up the companionway to the chart-room. He laid her down upon the chart-room deck, and, removing his sou'wester, sat down on the settee at the skipper's feet. A trickle of blood, from the wire-cut of a torn backstay, ran from his forehead to his beard. Wearily, his eyes upon the beauty of the model's sails, he leaned against the bulkhead and in a little while, worn by the long labors of the night, nodded and slept.

FROM the wet deck of the tramp men stared at the dismasted bark upon the sea ahead.

"Abandoned, sir," said the skipper.

The mate laid his binoculars down.

"I see a man in her chart-house, sir," he said.

Watching the wreck, they watched also the squalls that threatened along the heaved rim of the windward sea.

AN OLD man stood in the steamer's outswung boat, from which oil seeped to the tossing sea below.

"I daren't spare you another man, sir," said the skipper to his mate.

The mate made no reply. His eyes were shining, and on his lips there seemed to play the faint suggestion of a breaking smile.

From steamer to wreck a track of oil-smoothed waters lay over the surges, and

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as the boat dropped to the sea the two men cast off the tackle-blocks and grasped the oars. Then while the steamer headed away to pass to leeward of the wreck and await their return the rowers swung forth and back with steady, strong motion. The low cries of petrels were heard, faint on the wind's moan, as sprays uptossed by the advancing squall smote on the oarsmen. The rain fell faster, and hissed on the sea; a sibilant sound that whispered of terrors behind it.

The forward rower, turning his head, saw that the steamer was lost to sight in the weather to leeward.

"Lay back, Jake!" he shouted.

Upstanding sinews, corded muscles, quivered in the arms and shoulders of the two rowers.

The derelict lay ahead, a mournful shape, dim in the sea's upheavals.

"Lay back, Jake!" shouted the mate again, rain and wind and salt spray in his face.

A moment more and the boat, swinging to, rounded under the wreck's lee counter; tossing like a leaf upon a high November tide.

The mate, a hand to his lips, cried a long hail to the derelict.

From over the taffrail above him a white head looked down.

"Jump!" shouted the oarsmen together.

The bark, lurching, rolled her taffrail low, till all her canted deck was visible from the boat thwarts.

From the open chart-room door there gazed a thin white face.

Old Manus, his white hair wind tossed, pointed.

"Petrel, sir," he cried, above the sound of the advancing weather.

Ere the word had left his lips the mate leaped to the wreck's dipped bumpkin, and, grasping it, swung himself over the taffrail.

The squall broke. Torrential rain fell. The wind cried triumphantly. The bark, staggering to lee, crushed the boat beneath her, and while she lay in the heart of terror one old man hauled another from out of the dark devouring sea.

The mate of the steamer knelt in the chart-room, holding his old companion's hand fast in his own, while from within the door the two old sailors stared into the dying tempest's fury.

The sea became lighter. The storm-clouds parted. The last clear wind from that storm's heavy heart swept above an emerald-crested sea. The wreck, upswung by a roller, lay with the gale astern. Her two white sails windbellied, she gathered headway, while the sea cried challenge to her undefeated feet.

From the chart-room doorway a sailor pointed to the breaking glooms ahead.

Broadside in the path of the derelict wallowed the steamer, smoke and a whirl of cinders belching from her rusty funnel.

The derelict sped on, the sky brightening above her as she broke white waters from her shapely bow.

A shudder ran her length. She shook. She trembled, swept by the great, green seas that rolled victoriously.

She lay alone upon her sea, her last white wings a crumpled heap upon her forecastle head; a smother of oil and of whirled smoke-wisps round her collision-shattered bow.

The sun gleamed down, the sky's warm brightness reflected on the white-ridged sea.

A man who seemed to smile stepped from her chart-room, bearing in strong arms a fragile figure.

The winds sang, murmurous, above serene waters.

An old man came from the chart-room, a little ship held tight in his tired arms. He bore her aft to the wheel grating and laid her there; the breeze in her gracious wings, her bows toward headlands, very far away.

Kneeling at the break of the derelict's poop, the mate smoothed back his old companion's hair.

Old Manus knelt beside them, his brown face near the white.

Suddenly his arm, outstretched, encircled an arc of the watery universe.

"The sea—" he whispered.

A light shone in the face beside him.

"Ours—" came the smilingly whispered reply.

The foundering bark lurched, dipping low to twin summits of a crested roller.

PETRELS fly over the sea, hovering low to the hollows and high to the wild blue ridges—spirits at home, and happy in their chosen element.

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Hazard at Dusk

by C. M. Sublette

THE deep reverberations of the tally shot from the Midnight Mine boomed sullenly across the low hills around Silver Hill. A few loafers lounged comfortably in front of Ed Stalky's blacksmith shop watching the slow march of the sun down to his resting-place behind the red wall of the Sangre de Cristos. Conversation had worn to a thin trickle of monosyllables, then perished gently; so they sat silent, contemplative.

Then the last shot of the day rumbled up from the bowels of the Geyser mine and simultaneously the tiny, ant-like figures of men began to swarm across Two Mile Flat toward town—the day-shift was coming off at the Old Terrible mill. As the first men began to string into Silver Hill in groups of two or three a horseman turned the corner by George Hipps' big, brick store and trotted slowly down the street. He stopped in front of Stalky's shop and sat there on his impassive horse gazing out across the noble and impressive stretch of valley toward the hills. Michael Brule had come home!

He rode a big gray—a strong-going spectacular beast; and Brule was a fine sturdy figure—if you weren't a close observer. His saddle was silver-mounted and his feet were clothed in the finest, softest boots he could buy—that sort of thing! Swagger fellow—picturesque, bold-looking and bad, presumably; although observation teaches that men are bad only by comparison. Bad-men are like prize-fighters—there's always someone a little tougher and a little quicker!

On the whole he made a dashing appearance; handsome in a dark, florid way, he looked like a dandy, swashbuckler—story-book bad man; but—as old Henry Burt used to say—

"Bluffs was made to be called."

Today there are but fifteen people living in Silver Hill. Almost every one moved down to Westhill when the railroad built in there. But the day Michael Brule came in he had a good audience, for the boom was at its height and there were over five thousand silver-mad people in the old town—mostly men, but a sprinkling of women of both kinds.

Michael Brule was born in the hills on the eastern side of the valley. His father and his uncle ran cattle on that range for a time. They were bad, too; and had a fine disregard for the property rights of others. They left the valley between a sunset and a dawn with "Brand" Croslin and the whole Double B outfit after them. There was hard riding and gunplay in the grim cañon of the Hardscrabble. This was many, many years ago and the legend—which is dim—tells that Croslin got them both that night and came riding home through the dewy freshness of a Summer morning with a crimson stain on his shirt and his iron frame sagging in the saddle with exhaustion.

By the time young Brule grew up cows were in the discard and mining had taken the valley. Silver Hill grew up overnight; her streets were filled with men and propositions—air was crowded with millions—lodes, veins, drifts, shafts, tunnels were the

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constant topics of conversation. Nine miles away the older town of Rosita withered and faded away. Hundreds of vests caressed the mahogany each night and the subdued click of poker chips made a musical accompaniment for occasional conversations around green-topped tables. Those were the days before Congress began to take a personal interest in men's habits. Reformers were noticeable—by their absence. Such was the town that drew Michael Brule—a perfect setting for such activities as his.

The street was filling rapidly now with men coming in off the flat; big bearded men clumping heavily in their thick brogans; men in white-and-clay-stained clothes; women and children were running late errands to the stores—there was a cheerful bustle. Across the way a huge yellow cat came along the fence by Ed Stalky's house, sat her down in the slanting rays of the late sun and began an evidently much neglected toilet, licking her paws carefully with brilliant scarlet tongue.

Brule hooked one knee around his saddle-horn and watched her abstractedly. But almost at once—from the dim twilight of Stalky's shop—came an excited yapping; then a small, black dog shot like an arrow from the broad door and scrambled between the legs of the big gray. Old enemies, these—without doubt—for the yellow one took to instant flight. The little dog scampered madly after, sounding off sharply, his plumy tail debonairly upright.

As one man, the idlers craned forward to watch the chase. The great gray stallion plunged wildly as the dog darted under him, almost unseating his dreaming rider. Brule's face flushed angrily and settled suddenly into the harsh, deep-cut lines of an almost fiendish rage; he controlled his mount with a savage rein. His right hand flashed downward and came up—swift, certain—blazing death! There was a confused rush of leaping figures in the street and in the next second it was empty—lifeless.

Poor, gallant Little Black! The first heavy-calibered bullet tore his diminutive body from end to end, knocked him down; and four others ripped him through and through—smashed him to a bloody and inanimate pulp—as he lay, a singularly pitiful blot in the white dust of the street.

Of a sudden, Ed Stalky appeared in the doorway and peered with eyes, half-blinded by the bright glare outside, at the huddled little body in the dust. When he looked up at the man towering above him on the gray horse his broad face was twisted with honest rage. Brule wheeled his horse sharply to face Stalky and the long, blue barrel of the forty-five snapped swiftly into a horizontal position. It hung there, implacable, without a quiver.

"Anything to say, mister?" asked the horseman—there was an ugly grin on his face, but his eyes were unsmiling.

Stalky looked into the unwavering evil mouth of the gun for a long moment; his corded hands twitched; the spectators sat silent, engrossed. Then—

"Not now, stranger!" said Stalky.

Brule laughed derisively, holstered his gun and rode off down the street, which was again cautiously animate.

CAME a-riding, a few minutes later, a large man on a chunky pinto—splashed whimsically in three colors, red, white and granite-gray. Here was one of genial habit for he hummed cheerfully as he rode; and he rode slowly with due regard to the animal under him for the pinto paced sedately under a light rein. Perched on the lean thigh of this easy-going jogger was a rolypoly little girl who stared into his face in round-eyed admiration; while clinging to the back of his broad belt was a rolier-polier little boy, whose visible area was dotted to a truly wonderful degree with freckles, who admonished him with both voice and hard little fist to "Do faster!"

When the oddly-colored horse had almost reached the torn and riddled body of Little Black he rolled an inquiring eye that way, then circled away with dainty, mincing sidesteps. Merry humming ceased abruptly; the rider pulled his horse to a standstill and dismounted. He took the children down from their high seats and started them home, each with a light pat where it would do the most good.

He walked over and looked a long time at the mass of dull clay that had once been Little Black—cheerful, impudent, friendly Little Black—and as he looked his face darkened and a gleam of wrath was born in his steady eyes. A dull resentment grew up in his heart.

He went slowly back to the patient pinto,

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hooked the bridle over his arm and crossed over to Stalky's shop.

"Hello, Lou!" came a chorus of greeting.

"Who killed Little Black?" asked Lou sharply, without reply to the various salutations.

"Big, red-faced feller——" He was a garrulous man with a good gift of narrative, Mart Henry, who began and built up the tale with embellishments and assistance from the others; and as it took shape the slow anger in Lou's heart shaped itself accordingly to concentrate on a definite object.

"An' so forth! An' so forth!" he broke in upon Henry's eulogy of the stranger's shooting. "Point is: Who is he?"

"I c'n tell you who he is," answered Charlie Hylan. "That's Mike Brule! An' I don't want none of 'is game when he's fighting mad. Saw 'im get the sheriff an' two deputies over 't Galway's Gulch 'bout four year ago. He'll kill you just like he did that dog—without no reason—just fer fun!"

"I've heard of 'im," said Lou, shortly, and walked off with the paint horse trailing behind.

"Lou's sore but he better be careful 'bout mixin' with this here Brule," began Mart Henry.

"Don't go wastin' no worry on Lou!" old Henry Burt cut in. "With 'n even break he c'n beat Brule to it without half tryin'. I've knowed Lou since he was grasshopper high—seen 'im grow up here—an' he ain't no trouble-hunter; but he don't dodge it none, either. Far as shootin's concerned—say, feller!—Lou's jest plumb absolute! Brule won't run no sandy on him."

WHILE old Henry rambled on, the subject of his remarks was just entering the long pine shack, scrubbed but cheerless, which he dignified by the name of home. His head was bent in thought as he climbed the narrow stairs and made his way down the half-lit hall to his room. Be best to go heeled, ran the current of his reflections, long as we got a mad dog like that around—feller that'd kill Little Black out o' pure cussedness that way'd most likely pull anything. He went to the head of his narrow bed and took down the holstered gun that hung there on its broad belt; buckled it on. His big hand moved and the heavy butt of the gun seemed fairly to leap into his palm and cuddle there—as if it were a part of the man. It was unhurried, effortless and beautiful to see. The sense of power it gave him was reflected in the level stare of his dark, blue eyes.

Lou Wenzell was boss timberman at the Ten-to-One; and was accounted among his fellow craftsmen as the best of them all. In Silver Hill they called him "Little Lou" and his uncle "Big Lou," which was a paradox of sorts, since this latter was just tall enough to reach the second button on Little Lou's shirt. After supper Little Lou sauntered through town; took one drink; passed up with a bland smile the blandishments of a fair but business-like lady at the Gold Dollar; sat in a game at the Miner's Rest for a couple of hours with average luck and returned home at a fairly early hour. This was his nightly custom.

As mining-camps went at that time the citizens of Silver Hill kept a fair semblance of law and order; but, of course, judged by later standards, they were rather lenient. Brule mixed with the crowds along Main Street that night and announced himself. He made quite a stir for Silver Hill had heard of him before; his reputation had preceded him and he became the center of a small clique of satellites—governed by fear—who followed him in and out of the brightly lit doors on Main Street as he drank, bragged and bullied his way through the town. They would doubtless have seen him safely to bed had he not turned upon them terrible, blood-shot eyes and cursed them fiercely for a bunch of "rotten yellerbellies."

Brule heard of Lou Wenzell that night—several times. From what he gathered in the course of the evening, he decided that Lou might possibly prove a stumbling block to his progress in Silver Hill. It came to him that he must kill Wenzell and in the days that followed his mind—inflamed by drink, hot with plans for loot and power—mulled over this idea until it came to be an obsession.

It was inevitable that such a situation must precipitate itself, spend itself in action. At the Miner's Rest one evening—early, before the crowd had begun to gather—a few hangers-on were sitting, a dozen or so, half asleep and listless, just ready to wander on in search of excitement, when Michael Brule came in. There was a bit more than the ordinary swagger in the way he walked; it was evident that he had

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visited other bars before he reached the Miner's Rest.

Almost instantly, upon his entrance, the languid idlers stiffened to attention. There was something tight-drawn about the man, an ugly set to his jaw and a restlessness in those blank killer's eyes which saw everything. The man was a living portent of trouble and, flung as he was across their startled vision, he galvanized them into life. Only old Henry Burt seemed unmoved. His ancient eyes were keen enough for all his eighty years, but they held no flicker of interest. He had seen too many of them come and go. Unconsciously, conversation lowered in tone and finally stopped altogether—men watched Brule, slyly.

He walked straight to the bar and called roughly for whisky; slapped a silver dollar on the bar so that it cracked loudly and tossed off two stiff drinks without a quiver. Then he turned and leaned back against the polished rail with his thumbs hooked in his belt; the heavy six-gun on his hip gleamed dully. He inspected the occupants of the room with a nasty half-smile on his face; he said not a word, just stared at them as if they were beneath all contempt. Minute followed minute and still Brule stood there, negligent yet watchful; the light glinted blankly from his eyes as if reflected from the unyielding facets of gem-cut jet.

By this time there was a dead silence; men moved uneasily under that hard look, while the bartender polished glasses and attended to those other mysterious duties which used to occupy the spare time of bartenders. Victims of a self-generated apprehension, each of them feared that any movement, any word, would turn against him the full force of that evil which had for its source the sneering, deadly figure propped against the bar.

It was then that they heard the sound of feet at the door; the solid *clump, clump, clump,* of miner's boots broke the sinister quiet of the room—an honest, comforting sound that fairly thundered through the stillness and, in some degree, relieved the tautness of their nerves. It was Lou Wenzell, walking across the floor with all his usual serenity. Evidently, he wasn't in the least disturbed, although he must have known the instant he entered the door that there was something strange in the air. A blind man could have sensed the tension.

Brule's snaky eyes shifted to the door at the first sound from that direction and he swung his big body half-way around to face the newcomer. Lou nodded and spoke to some of the men, but cast only a casual glance toward the menacing stranger at the bar. Old man Burt shifted his chair so as to get a clear view of the whole room; men glanced at each other questioningly, with suppressed excitement in their eyes. Otherwise, there was no movement, no sound; and when the bartender spoke his voice seemed unusually full and strong.

"What'll it be, Lou?" he asked; there was an uneasy note in the way he said it.

"Same old varnish-remover, Charlie," Lou answered, agreeably.

At the sound of Lou's name Brule wheeled about with the quickness of a cat and faced him.

"They tell me you're cock-o'-the-walk around this camp," he said, loudly.

There was a definite inflection of mockery in his tone; it was obvious that he meant to fasten a quarrel on Wenzell.

"I don't aim to crow no more than my share," said Lou, shortly. His eyes looked winterish and narrowed; his body turned slightly and he gazed directly into the expressionless eyes confronting him. "In fact," Wenzell continued, "crowin' ain't my long suit, but—if they's any crowin' to be done around here this evenin', I'll do it! You get me, don't you, stranger?"

Brule's face flushed a deep red and his eyes were unsteady—murder looked out of them; his heavy black mustache bristled. He shook in the grip of hate like a strong tree in a wind, a veritable mask of passion, violent and pitiable. Wenzell seemed unimpressed. He was magnificent—absolutely master of himself—with a blue glare in his eyes like the sun on new ice, terrible and pitiless.

Seeing that Brule was making no answer, he was incapable of speech at that moment, Lou went on in a dead level voice—even, smooth—

"While we're on the subject, Brule, I'll ladle out a little friendly advice——"

But Brule had lost all semblance of control—snapped the last thread of restraint; his hand swept downward in a lightning swoop for his gun. The spectators sat fascinated — contracted, cramped, intent — their eyes aching from the concentrated stare. Little Lou made but one movement, an indescribably rapid and beautiful sweep

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like the quick dip of a hunting hawk; and as Brule's falling hand reached his gun he felt the hard nose of a .45 driven into his belly.

He froze as he was, his face contorted with hate; a great vein swelled and knotted on his forehead, and his shifty eyes, set deep under dark scowling brows, seemed fairly to flame. Then he glanced upward at Wenzell, and the blood drained out of his face like water running out of a pond. He went pale and gray and his hand fell, nerveless, away from his gun.

Wenzell's face was set in an icy finality and his eyes glowed like twin torches; there was a grim certainty in the set of his body. It looked like a certain killing.

For a few seconds there was no sound except the trickle of water dripping behind the bar; then Lou continued his remarks:

"Now that we're all comfortable again—" he emphasized each point by prodding Brule with his gun—"I'll go ahead with my advice. Short an' sweet's my idea of advice. Don't start any killin' 'round here! Go easy! That's all! The next time I make a gun-play I won't be so kind-hearted! Now, hop it! Get t' —— out o' here—an' forget to come back!"

Brule walked to the door and turned.

"Keep yourself heeled all the time, Wenzell," he said, and backed down the step to the street.

NATURALLY, Brule's last remark didn't carry much conviction after the scene that had just passed, and nobody felt it more than Brule, himself. He knew that he had played a ridiculous part, and that knowledge fanned the fire of his hatred for Lou Wenzell to a white intensity. Silver Hill speculated much on the incident. Henry Burt remarked in his cracked, high voice that "Brule just said that 'bout keepin' heeled to save 'is face. Don't need to tell nobody to carry a club when they's snakes around."

"Oh, he's a snake—Brule is," said Charlie Hylan. "Anyway, he sure crawled on 'is belly tonight." He chuckled. "It's sure up to Mister Brule. He opened it and bet, an' Lou raised 'im. It's his turn. There'll be a killin' the next time them two get together. Lou'll gun 'im—sure as ——! He promised 'im an' he'll do it!"

Brule dropped out of sight that night and for a day or two Silver Hill congratulated herself that she was rid of him. Then Bob Tanner, who was freighting from Cotopaxi, reported that he had met him on the road; and Bob cursed him most outrageously for crowding him at the top of Seven Mile Hill.

"Had that big gray all flattened out, sluggin' agin the bit," Bob said, "an' goin' like a buffalo bull; crowded my leader over onto the edge of the bluff and dam' near put the whole works in the gulch. Next time I'll give 'im a belly full o' lead to remember me by!"

Bob always inclined toward the drastic in his speech.

Late the next afternoon after Tanner's meeting with Brule a series of startling events began to occur and they kept Silver Hill in a state of feverish excitement until late that night. First of all came one Bill Harries, riding a spent and lathered horse, and stopped at the sheriff's office. A few minutes later the sheriff, Charlie Sperry, came tumbling out of that office as if the devil were after him and began to gather a posse.

The first man he asked for was Lou Wenzell; no posse was considered complete without him, but Lou was not to be found. As fast as Sperry deputized them the men walked off in all directions to gather the equipment for a man-hunt. A crowd suddenly materialized in that mysterious fashion so usual to them and surrounded Bill Harries, endeavoring by dint of many questions to find out what the trouble was.

"Four *hombres*," Bill told them, "stuck up the Rio Grande train between Texas Creek and Cotopaxi. Got a good description of three of 'em. One was a peg-legged geezer; must be "Peg" Wilson. Don't know nothin' atall 'bout the fourth man 'cause the only feller that seen 'im is deader'n a herrin'. Climbed right in the car and shot —— out o' the messenger! Never give 'im no chance; just filled 'im full o' lead. They headed over into Oak Creek hills. Lord knows where they are by this time!"

And there Bill's information stopped.

Soon the street in front of the sheriff's office held a colorful and picturesque throng. Some of the posse sat silent on quiet horses; others were busy with rifles and six-guns, tying down holsters, tightening cinches—making all the grim preparations for battle. Women watched their men with an age-old premonition of disaster at the back of their eyes. The self-important members of the

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community were bustling about clothed in a pompous air of mystery as if the whole weight of the affair had fallen unsolicited on their shoulders. Every town has them—some one must furnish the comedy. As a matter of fact, Charlie Sperry was a rather efficient officer, evidenced by the fact that he held the office for many years.

Just as the posse was mounting a boy came clattering up on an old white horse.

"Wait a minute, sheriff," he shouted. "Them three stick-ups is holed up in that ol' cabin in Reed's Gulch an' dad an' some of our riders is holdin' 'em there."

This was news that changed the whole complexion of the matter for the sheriff—simplified things into a matter of superior gunplay rather than a long and grueling man-hunt—made a holiday of a workday!

At that moment Lou Wenzell turned the corner by the *Rattler* office. He was carrying something in his arms, but moving rapidly. Charlie Sperry saw him at once and rode down the street toward him with part of the posse strung out behind him. As Lou neared them they saw that he was carrying a girl in his arms—Axel Peterson's daughter. Her hair had come down; and fell in a soft, shining cloud of gold almost to the ground; they could see the smooth, childish round of one cheek, marble-white against the rough breast of Lou's dark coat.

She was crying, spasmodically—soft little sobs that choked her—and Lou was patting her shoulder lightly and talking softly, as one who soothes a child; but his face was cold and rocky-hard; his eyes glared fiercely with the reflection of some hot, inward flame of anger. He walked straight up to Mrs. Bob Tanner and asked her to take care of the girl until his return; and that great-hearted lady gathered the girl to her ample breast and hurried her away from the circle of curious eyes that surrounded her.

Wenzell turned to the sheriff.

"Sperry, I want to be sworn in as a deputy. Some one shot Axel Peterson down right at the door of his cabin yesterday an' the kid's been holdin' the fort all alone out there ever since. She's scared an' hungry. Axel didn't even have a gun on 'im. From what Hilga says I think I know who killed 'im an' I figger to get scattered together an' go get 'im."

Hilga Peterson had described Brule accurately enough to put it beyond any doubt; his vivid, sneering face had impressed itself ineffaceably upon a mind made plastic by terror.

When Lou rode out of town an hour later on the paint horse—girded for battle—there was a look in his eyes as inexorable as death. At that moment when he had found Axel Peterson slumped across his own doorstone—a harmless plodder pinched off without a chance—there had sprung, full-fledged, in Lou's breast a terrible anger. He determined then to bring in the mad dog who had done this thing—and he meant to bring him in dead!

IT WAS during that afternoon that a great fear grew up in the heart of Michael Brule and turned it to water. He had murdered and bullied his way through a dozen camps, but now it came to him, at last, that some tardy, but unrelenting, fate was closing in on him. He had become a stench in the nostrils of both God and man. Yet he went on; he was on a road of his own choosing from which he could not turn aside; and there was nothing left to do but tread that path to the end. Those were bitter hours he spent with himself, riding through the lonely, impressive silence of the immortal hills, listening to the secret voices that whispered in his half-crazed brain.

There are men, certainly, who are incapable of remorse. But Michael Brule was not one of these. His Irish mother had endowed him with a superstitious and sensitive nature and the anguish of guilt was no new thing to him. But always those faces had faded, those low complaints had ceased and peace had come to his troubled soul.

But now, with these murders so recent, he saw the placid, smiling face of Axel Peterson on every bush; in the dim twilight of the pines the dreadful astonished face of the express messenger gleamed and died away in each vista, only to reappear in the next. Since leaving his companions Brule had circled far to the north, working back south again through the wild gulches of the Wet Mountains to the Hardscrabble. For company he had a weary, drooping horse, his own confused thoughts and the ghosts of dead men.

His disordered mind wove numberless plans for escape which were never finished, interrupted by the soft murmurs of voices—dead voices in a living world.

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Sharply conceived pictures rose and succeeded one another before his inward eye: the swift crumpling of the messenger, the thunder of the report in the narrow space of the car, that slow, red trickle across the rough boards of the floor— The details irritated him! That single explosive—"God!" The fool had sounded as if he meant it. No doubt he did. Occasionally, his self-love overcame all other thought and justified him to himself. These were his thoughts and sensations, the comrades of his solitary ride.

Out of it all came a plan—not a bad one, either—but unfortunate. He calculated that he would lay over and rest his horse at the ruined ranch-house that had once been his father's. It was buried in the timber down on the South Hardscrabble and had not been used for many years. He reached the tumble-down building, now the abode of mountain rats and owls, about an hour before sundown; tied his horse to a corner of it, visible from the road, and looked about him.

Two hundred feet up the cañon and a little above the road lay a big rock; and it was behind this that Brule took up his position with his rifle still in its scabbard by his side. From where he lay Brule commanded the road in both directions and was protected from the rear by the high, overhanging walls of the cañon. It was a strategic position but the plan was unfortunate because Little Lou had considered all the possibilities—he carried in his mind an almost minute map of the locality—and then decided that the surest place to catch Brule was in South Hardscrabble Cañon, the quickest way out of the valley.

Brule lay there as the sun went down, close-covered, his mind wandering in aimless, disjointed leaps back over the events of the last two days. That fool Swede—didn't want nothin' but that pretty, yeller-haired gal; first, because she was Wenzell's girl—found that out—then later—well—good thing she'd got that door closed on her scared face—pinched an' white like she'd seen a snake—always liked yeller hair—glowin' like yeller gold in the sun—liked that, too—yeller gold—soft, round, white arms—like they was carved out o' iv'ry—made for love, she was—queer a squarehead like Peterson'd have a daughter like that—too good to be pickin's for a hound like Wenzell—him an' his advice——

The breeze that comes at sunset began to sing its little humming song in the trees about him and a few stars appeared, winking remotely in the darkening vault above. A dozen times he was startled by little snapping noises in the brush. —— nerves! he thought. God! What a fool he'd been to come into this country—you couldn't get out of it! Nobody could bluff that Wenzell—cold as a wedge, he was—had the fightin'-est glare in his eyes! What a fool—Wenzell was sure to be with the posse; must be one out by this time. Eyes playin' tricks on 'im; ears, too—blast that Swede—why had he moved?

A whisper came down the breeze to him, sibilant. That blockheaded Swede! Would he never let up? It seemed cold. He shivered and rolled over wildly, clawing with shaking hands at his gun. Surely, something was hiding there in the brush, but the minutes passed and there was nothing. Again the weird soughing of the wind in the branches carried an eerie message to him—the guttural, broken voice of Axel Peterson, broken short in a coughing grunt. He half-started up, only to relax again in disgust at himself. Curses bubbled against his compressed lips. He wondered what that squarehead had meant to say when he met death with that mild smile on his round, good-natured face.

Whatever it was the deep cry of the blazing gun had cut it off. If there was a hell or a heaven why didn't the fools go there instead o' botherin' him? All bosh! Sweet pap for these here white-livered pups that was afraid to go ahead an' take what they wanted. A cool wind came suddenly cold and clammy against his cheek; he felt a presence, gloomy and depressing. He looked about him furtively, grinding his teeth hard to preserve his self-possession.

Then it was that he first heard the regular *clop, clop, clop*, of a horse's feet on the hard trail from the valley. He held his breath and listened for a second; then rose to his knees snatching, panic-stricken, at the six-gun on his hip, and watching intently over his granite rampart for the first appearance of the rider. The horseman advanced deliberately; the steady-gaited animal never varied his pace. Brule cursed softly to himself. —— rotten nerves; his hands shook abominably. After all, probably some cow-hand goin' home—nothin' to worry about.

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His eyes strained into the darkness, which was settling fast—strained until they seemed about to burst from their sockets. Then some errant gleam of light outlined for an instant the stern and composed features of the approaching man. It was Lou Wenzell! Fatality! Fear took Brule's soul in its stark grip and shook it to its foundations. He pulled himself together by a tremendous effort and listened to the unwavering advance, the uniform *clop, clop, clop* of hoofs. They came on, as even as the ticks of a clock, relentless and exact—tireless footsteps of the hunter.

When this unvarying progress had brought Little Lou exactly opposite him Brule rose from the earth in a single bound. But a scant ten feet separated them. The red flare of the shot stabbed the dusk like a bloody finger and the sullen song of the gun shattered the twilight stillness like a voice roaring up from hell. It was cast back from the hard stone faces of the cañon in a thousand deep-echoing repetitions. What with the catlike sidespring of the big pinto and the heavy shock of the .45 slug Little Lou was shot clean out of his saddle with the bullet in his left shoulder.

"By——I've got you, Wenzell!" he heard Brule shouting in exultation, as he fell crashing to the ground.

He made no answer; a warm flood was rushing down over his chest and arm. He was dazed and faint, retaining consciousness only by a great effort. He must not let go; he had to act! Brule had sunk down again behind his shelter. Lou could hear him muttering there—disconnected babblings of blasphemies and obscenities—and chance-caught words gave Lou the key to the situation.

"I'll fool you, you —— Swede."

That was it. Lou thought fast. His shoulder began to ache and burn; but the earlier faintness was passing away—his brain was clearer.

First, he slipped his gun cautiously from its holster and laid it on the road beside him, taking care to make no sound; then searched about him with his good right hand until his groping fingers closed about a good-sized stone, gathered himself up and tossed the pebble as far as he could up the sloping bank of the draw above the spot where Brule lay—quiet now—listening for the voices. The missile fell crackling through thick undergrowth. Lou raised himself on his elbow, the .45 in his right hand. At the sound above him Brule whirled and sprang to his feet. Little Lou calmly shot him through the head; and his body half-turned, doubled up and then toppled sprawling across the rock which had hidden him.

Again the narrow defile echoed to the deep-throated bay of the gun; Wenzell sank back upon the ground.

BACK in Silver Hill there was much wonderment and vain speculation until Sperry came in with two dead prisoners and one badly wounded. Best of all, he had a complete confession. Brule was the main-spring of the train robbery. There had been a long hard battle in Reed's Gulch; the guns boomed all through the late afternoon until, with the fall of darkness, Sperry fired the cabin where the bandits had fortified themselves. When the cabin became untenable they came out into the red firelight—came shooting—and died in their boots with a fortitude that was worthy of a better cause.

Scarcely had the story been told when Lou Wenzell rode into the circle of light that shone in front of the sheriff's office. All that was mortal of Michael Brule was lashed to the saddle of Brule's gray. Lou was weaving around in his saddle like a drunken man—held there by his own will and very little else—his face white and drawn. He slid weakly from his saddle; climbed a step at a time—stiffly upright—on to the porch, and lurched unsteadily into the room.

"Come to report, Sperry," he said, his voice was but a whisper. "Your man's outside— I brought 'im in—" He slid forward into Charlie Sperry's arms.

Gradually, all Silver Hall learned the story—mostly through the offices of Mrs. Tanner, who had it direct from Hilga Peterson. After his recovery Lou threw up his job at the Ten-to-One and began to develop the Sailor Boy, Peterson's claim. It made him rich. The whole affair is now one of the favorite legends of the valley in its heroic days; and the older men love to tell you of Lou Wenzell's wife—they dwell especially on the beauty of her hair with the sun on it, like fine gold. She died a few years ago, but Lou stays on—lives still in Silver Hill—alone, except for his golden memories.

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Gold

by A. I. MacNamee

"DANGED funny thing, this here huntin' fer gold," said George Ripley, squaw man, prospector, guide, lumberman, and loafer in general, easing himself into a comfortable position in the shade of the "eatin' shack."

The discussion, started at table amongst the men employed at Boulette's saw-mill, had been caused by the arrival of a new prospector—a stranger in the district—and George carried it out of doors as a fruitful subject of discussion during the regular noon-time smoke.

DANGED funny thing! (he continued). Men paddle off into th' wilderness, a riskin' their lives every minnit, to find gold—just so they can give it to some woman, an' then—after they find it, an' give it to her—they got to keep right on hustlin' to get more fer her.

Men ought to git sense, like I got. I married me a squaw. Married her young, built me a log-house over yon there, an' now I don't have to worry about nothin'. She kin take care o' th' place, an' ketch fish, or shoot deer an' moose as well as I kin. She's got a bit of a garden too, so I don't have to work—only whenever I want to—or need tobacco—an' I always got a home to go to, an' somethin' good to eat there.

But white women ain't like squaws. With white women ye got to hustle, an' ye got to strike it lucky too, or you lose 'em. Any you fellers ever hear of Ben Wilton?

Well, when Ben first come up here to Manigatogen, he was as fine, upstandin' a boy as ever came into Manitoba, or the whole of Canada either, fer that matter. Straight as an arrow, he was built, an' so danged straight-minded that he wouldn't stake an' sell a wildcat even if he had a chanct.

Said he didn't believe in it—stakin' a piece of land that he knowed didn't have no gold on it an' sellin' it to a greenhorn as a minin' claim, wasn't nothin' less than stealin' in his opinion, an' would hurt the whole Rice Lake minin' industry.

'Bout th' time he landed here this here danged settlement took a notion they had to have a school teacher. There wasn't only five or six white children an' a passel of Injun kids, an' I never could figger out why the settlement should spend good money edgicatin' Injuns. Dang 'em: They don't appreciate it.

They taxed me four whole dollars fer school taxes, an' I had to work two days an' a half in th' mill to git th' money—an' I ain't even got a Injun kid to edgicate.

Well, anyhow, th' whole settlement was sot on it so they sent down to th' Peg an' got Lindy Gillispie fer a teacher—her havin' graduated from one of them danged fancy Winnipeg schools.

She hadn't been here no time at all till Ben Wilton met up with her, an' any one with half an eye could see that they both fell in love right away.

They sure did make up to each other a whole lot, but Ben didn't have much money, an' he was too danged proud to ask a gal like Lindy to share nothin' at all with him, so he made up his mind he was a goin' to make money or bust a-tryin'.

Come Spring, an' he spent most all th' cash he had fer an outfit, an' prepared to hike fer th' bush—allowin' that he was a goin' to stake a bonanza this time, as sure as shootin'.

I sort of liked th' boy, an' talked to him with tears in my eyes, urgin' him not to be so particular in his prospectin'.

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"Stake any old kind of a stringer," says I," an' let th' man you sell it to worry about whether there's any gold in it or not."

He wouldn't listen to anything of that sort though, an' jest kept on insistin' that he *knowed* he'd find somethin' real good, *this* time.

Well, the Summer drifted by an' with the first heavy frosts, Ben hiked in. Hadn't found nothin' he figgered was worth stakin', an' felt kinder blue about it, but sight of Lindy sort of cheered him up, an' first thing we knowed, he was a workin' here in th' mill, as cheerful an' as chipper as could be—an' I ain't never yet figgered out why th' danged boy would ruther work hard like that, than to take easy money away from city fellers that ain't got no more sense than to buy wildcat claims.

Anyhow, he worked there until Spring come, an' then his whole Winter's savin's was spent fer grub, an', off he went again. But Fall found him back without no claims—without no money—without nothin' but the danged stubborn idee that he'd be sure to have better luck next Spring.

Him an' Lindy was a keepin' stiddy company that Winter, an', bein' sort of friendly with him, like I was, I asked him why they didn't git married.

Say—don't none of ye ever ask nobody why they don't git married—unlessen ye want to have 'em say a whole lot that ye'd ruther not hear about yourself.

When I asked him, Ben flared all up like a big timber fire, an' started in to tell me just what he thought about me, an' then, after he'd got it all off of his chest, he cooled down and explained that he couldn't ask her to marry him until he had somethin' to give her, as a sort of an inducement—Huh! Th' danged fool!

COME away early Spring an' a feller come into th' settlement. Mighty slick talkin' sort of a feller he was too, but when he was a talkin' to any one his eyes would be a rovin' all about as if he was watchin' for somethin' or somebody. Kinder give me th' shivers jets to watch th' restlessness of his eyes.

He allowed that his name was "McDonald," an' that he was a sort of a minin' engineer who had struck it rich an' was lookin' for some seecluded sort of a bush town to settle down in, where he wouldn't have to bother a meetin' strange people, an'—my great glitterin' pyrites!—he sure struck it right when he hit Manigatogen, fer this settlement don't see two strange people in a year—exceptin' once in a while a prospector or two—an' they ain't neither strange, nor people—they're just danged fools that likes to live in th' bush, an' tries to fool themselves, an' everybody else, with th' idee that they're a goin' to make a good livin' at it.

Well, this McDonald, he settled down here, a batchin' fer himself, in a cabin up by Woods Falls, an' soon as ever he seen Lindy, he started in a courtin' her right away.

Ben, he didn't like it a bit—everybody could see that, but he couldn't say nothin' cause he wasn't engaged to th' gal, nor nothin'—but sure as shootin', whenever he'd go to call on her, which was mostly every evenin', either McDonald 'ud be there first, or would come along mighty soon, an' would do most of th' talkin' to Lindy, while Ben couldn't do nothin' but set an' glare.

McDonald was a sort of mystery to us folks of th' settlement, an' we tried every way to find out somethin' about him but he was danged slick.

Ask him any question about himself an' he'd start in to answer it. He'd talk fer half an hour an' then after he'd finished an' gone away, ye'd find out that he hadn't answered th' question at all.

One day when Sergeant Thomas, of the "Mounties" was here on his way North, I asked him if he knowed McDonald an' we went up to Woods Falls together, to call on him, but Mr. McDonald had gone off into th' bush, leavin' a note tacked to th' door of his cabin, sayin':

> Gone to look at claim. Back in two or three days.

Sergeant Thomas, he didn't care—he wasn't lookin' fer McDonald anyhow—just a-makin' a friendly call—but I thought it was danged funny that, that night, after the "Mounty" had gone, I seen McDonald, all dressed up, a-goin' to call on Lindy.

I asked him about it an' he laughed, sayin' that he was sure sorry to have been away when th' sergeant called, an' th' reason he was back was because he'd had an upset in "Old Woman" rapids that afternoon, an' had got his whole outfit wet, so he just put his trip off 'till another day.

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He sure was a mystery all right. He was well-dressed, well-eddicated, had money, an'—every two weeks, when th' mail come in—he'd git a whole stack of books an' magazines. An' o' course that was an excuse fer callin' on Lindy, fer he'd bring her a book, or somethin', every time he came.

Ben, he didn't have nothin' to give her. He didn't have no nice clothes, an' he didn't have eddication enough to make up a whole lot of pretty speeches, like th' other feller did.

Havin' become good friends he talked to me a whole lot, an' he 'lowed that he didn't have nothin' to give her except th' love of an honest heart, an' I tried to tell him that honest love don't count much with most white women—leastwise, not compared with money—but he wouldn't say nothin', an' he wouldn't do nothin'. Anyhow, he was too danged proud to speak to her about it.

I could see that he was a gettin' bitterer an' bitterer about it. There was a sort of a broodin' look in his eyes an' he wasn't so happy like an' care-free as he had been—an' then, he decided to hit out again, an' try fer a claim that would make him some money.

Me—I didn't have nothin' to do—havin' married a squaw, an' squaws bein' so gifted that they'll find a livin' anyhow without worryin' whether their men works or not—an' I liked that boy fine, so I decided to throw in with him, an' I worked three whole weeks at th' mill t' git enough to buy my share of th' outfit.

Soon's th' river got down reasonable we started out. Ben had asked Lindy to come down to see him off, an' when startin' time come, an' she wasn't there, he insisted on waitin'.

I wanted to go on, an' told him he ought to fergit th' white gal, an' hook up with a squaw—which is a reasonable sort of female ye kin beat —— out of if she don't come when ye tell her to—but he told me to shut up or he'd pitch me overboard. An' he'd a done it, dang him, if I hadn't kept my trap closed.

Well, we waited pretty nigh an hour, an' then she come—an' McDonald was with her, with his nice clothes, an' his greasy smile, an' his restless, watchful eyes.

Ben didn't say much. Jest shook hands with Lindy, scowled at McDonald an' shoved off. I was paddlin' bow, an' th' way he shoved that stern paddle thro' th' water made me hump myself, an' think longin' like of my little cabin, an' my squaw.

Th' danged fool kept a paddlin' like a crazy man, an' if I'd slack up a bit to take a rest, he'd whack me over th' shoulders with his paddle—an' I couldn't turn around to git back at him, fer a canoe ain't th' steadiest footin' the th' world, an' I can't swim.

Prospectin'? Huh! He was a lookin' desperate fer somethin' good, an' a goin' thro' th' woods so danged fast he wouldn't a-knowed a good lead if he'd found one—an' th' worst part was that I had to tag along 'cause he was a-usin' his canoe an' I didn't feel like gittin' out an' wadin' around thro' th' muskegs.

I saw several leads what might have been worth lookin' into, but they wasn't good enough indications to suit him fer he was lookin' fer a rich minin' claim to give to a woman—while I was only jest lookin' fer any old sort of a claim to sell to a tenderfoot.

It was a mighty rainy summer, an' we lost lots of time, so when early Fall come we hadn't staked a thing, an' was almost out of grub, an' mad at each other too—account of me always urgin' him to fergit his fool notions an' stake him out two or three wildcats.

One day, when we was out back of Clearwater Lake, an' had worked eenamost over to Big Rice Lake, Ben says to me, says he:

"George, I'm through. I've tried to be square. I've tried to find a decent claim to offer to the best little gal in th' world, an' I can't find one. I'm losin' my grip, George, on her, an' everything else, an' now I'm through. I don't give a —— fer honesty nor nothin' else. I'm goin' to stake th' wildest kind of a wildcat, an' when I sell it—I'm goin' to git me some decent clothes, marry Lindy an' kick that —— McDonald clear offen the face of th' earth."

Me, though I was surprized a whole heap, I agreed with him cordial, so we both of us rustled about there an' staked around sort of promiscuous like, an' we wasn't lookin' fer no free gold showin' neither—any little old stringer of quartz was enough to be called a prospect.

He showed me one of 'em that he staked. A narrow lead it was too, about eight inches wide, an' as hungry lookin' quartz as I ever looked at, but because it was long he figgered it was a prize wildcat

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He named th' danged thing Staten Island, 'cause he said that'd make it sound big to anybody what knew anything about New York, an' then, as it was gettin' pretty well onto freeze-up time we hit out on th' back track.

From th' minnit of startin' back he was as crazy as a loon, wanted to make th' whole trip in one day. Couldn't think of nothin' except that he was a-goin' back to Lindy, an' I'm a sayin' we sure went down th' river some fast, till at last I went on strike, an' we finally camped for th' night about seven miles above th' settlement.

Me, I wasn't in no particular hurry but Ben had me up an' half-way through breakfast before I was really awake, so we got a good early start an' landed in Manigatogen about eight o'clock.

First place Ben headed fer was fer Lindy's boardin'-house, an' he went fast too, but in jest a few minnits he comes a r'arin' back, an' he sure was one ugly brute, fer Lindy was gone—an' so was McDonald.

We asked around about the howsomever of their goin', an' old man Catell what runs th' store, says that McDonald jest got into his canoe an' paddled off into th' lake, an' that th' next trip of th' mail-boat had took Lindy in on her way to th' Peg.

Old man Catell 'lows as how he hadn't never liked her, nor he hadn't liked McDonald neither, an' he offers to bet his pet hound-dog that the two of 'em has e-loped together.

I thought I knowed how to cuss pretty well, but after listenin' to Ben's language fer five minutes I quit braggin' about my own cussin' fer he ripped old man Catell up an' down an'side ways fer a good five minnits without usin' th' same word twict, an' then he up an' knocked him down fer good measure.

He didn't have much to say after that, but when th' mail went in, him an' me went with it to record our claims, an' he wasn't like th' same boy at all. Jest sat around a growlin' to himself, an' didn't have no good words fer nobody.

When we get into th' Peg we went to a hotel, an' Ben was so danged cranky an' sour that me an' him sort of separated, cause I can't see no sense in gettin' into no fights what ain't necessary.

Well, after a few days I'm about fed up with city life an' figgerin' on hittin' back to th' bush, when I meet up with Ben again.

He was singin' drunk, an' mighty happy, an' informs me that th' world's jest full of suckers, an' that he 's sold th' Staten Island to a Doctor Williamson fer a hundred dollars.

I tried to git him to go back to home with me then, but he says, "Money was made to spend," an' he's a goin' to help th' prohibition people out by drinkin' up all th' booze in th' world.

He ain't satisfied with talkin' that way to me, but goes around, howlin' drunk, an' tellin' everybody how he sold a wildcat an' what a sucker Doc Williamson is.

'Twasn't long 'fore Doc hears it an tries to git Ben to give him back his money, but by that time most all th' money is spent an' Doc is ravin', but there ain't nothin' much he can do.

ONE day we meets up with Charlie Whipple an' he starts in congratulatin' Ben on strikin' it rich with th' Staten Island claim, but Ben tells him that it ain't nothin' but a stringer, an' brags of how he's unloaded it on Doc.

After Ben had gone after another drink I got Charlie to tell me all about it, an' it was th' biggest surprise I ever had, fer it seems that McDonald an' Charlie, happenin' to pass the claim, had wondered why on earth th' honest Ben had staked such an unpromisin' lookin' vein.

McDonald, bein' a nosey sort of a cuss anyhow, had put a couple shots into her, an' Charlie says that right under th' surface th' vein widened out to about three feet, an' with plenty free gold showin'.

I tried to get Ben sobered up enough to realize th' facts, but seein' that it was hopeless, I went to Doc an' offered, in Ben's name, to take back th' claim—but I was too late.

McDonald had come around, congratulatin' Doc on his purchase, an' then, when Doc starts cussin', had laughingly offered to take it off Doc's hands fer just what he'd paid fer it, as a sort of a spec-u-lation, an' o' course Doc takes him up quick. But ye ought to a heard th' cussin' when I told Doc what Charlie had jest told me; but me —I says:

"Ain't that jest th' way? A feller tries to git somethin' fer a white woman, an' because th' luck breaks slow fer him, some other feller gits both her an' th' claim."

When I finally succeed in gettin' Ben

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started toward soberin' up, with th' idee of gettin' him home again, I get another set-back, fer we meets McDonald face to face, an' o' course he has to do a little braggin'.

Ben would have passed him without speakin', but McDonald gets in th' way an' won't move until he's said his say, an' he told all about how he was a goin' to reap th' benefit of th' Staten Island claim.

Ben stood it fer a minnit an' then he slams th' dirty skunk a good one plumb on th' chin—a blow that lifted him clean offen his feet and slammed him against a buildin'.

McDonald picks himself up, an' his face was white an' evil, while those restless eyes of his was restlesser than ever an' looked mean an' ugly—like th' eyes of a snake.

"It's all right fer you to knock me down," he says. "I ain't no kind of a fist-fighter a-tall, but I'll get you fer that blow, an' I'll git ye good. I got your claim now, that you was fool enough to sell fer a wildcat— I got your gal too—an' I'm a goin' to git you."

Ben makes a jump fer him, but I catched his arm 'cause there was a policeman a comin' toward us, an' by th' time he'd pried loose from me McDonald had disappeared.

Ben is madder'n —— an' he ain't missed McDonald's statement about th' gal. It all makes him so mad that he's jest got to have a drink, an' every drink he takes he gits madder.

'Long about six o'clock we meets another prospector—a guy that's made pretty near a fortune from sellin' wildcats. He was all dressed up—had a flower in his button-hole an' everything. I says to him:

"Hello, Pappinette. What ye doin' all dressed up? Goin' to a funeral or somethin'?"

An' he says:

"——! Ain't ye heard? One of th' fellers from Manigatogen's a goin' to git married tonight. Th' school-teacher an' that dude feller, McDonald, is a gittin' married an' I'm a goin'."

Ben was pretty drunk an' I was afraid from th' way he looked that he was a goin' to tie into Pappinette, but he helt hisself in an' asked where was th' weddin' to be. Havin' found that out me an' him went out to have us a drink, fer I thought that he needed it bad.

Havin' had a drink or two an' it not seemin' to do him any good, I figgered to cheer him up by tellin' him he was better off fer loosin' her, 'cause there ain't no white woman makes as good a wife as a squaw. But th' danged fool, instead of appreciatin' my interest, he gits mad an hit me in th' eye, an' he hits so danged hard that I forgot to say anything back to him about it.

After I gets so I can see again I buys him a drink to show there ain't no hard feelin's, an' then he buys me one, an' pretty soon we gits to feelin' sorry fer each other.

He tells me how much he loves Lindy an' how empty his life is a goin' to be without her, an' he told it so danged piteous that it made me cry.

Then, pretty soon, he gits to thinkin', mebbe he ain't treatin' th' gal right. If she wants another man it's all right, an' it ain't right to be mad at her fer it. Then he discovers that he ain't congratulated her nor nothin'; an' I ain't neither, so we has another drink an' starts fer th' church.

On th' way there we meet Sergeant Thomas an' another Mountie. They wanted us to stop an' talk with 'em fer a while, but me an' Ben told 'em tearfully how we'd wronged th' gal by not congratulatin' her, an' we didn't have time to stop.

WE BUSTED away from 'em at th' church door, an' went in, expectin' to find a whole crowd of people there, but there wasn't only a few, an' right away we seen Lindy an' McDonald a-standin' up together in front of th' parson.

We marched up th' aisle kinda quiet like an' nobody seen us 'till we got pretty close, an' then Lindy seen us an' kinda screamed.

McDonald looks up, an' right away he lets out a squawk an' ducked behind th' preacher who was so startled that he dropped his book an' squawked too, an' tried to turn around to see what was a holdin' him.

Lindy grabs Ben, an' hollers:

"You shouldn't have come here. Get out. Get out quick. Don't let 'em catch you."

She tries to shove him toward a little door that was a standin' half-ways open.

Ben he refuses to be shoved. He stands lookin' foolish at her fer a minnit, an' then he says:

"I know I'm a little drunk, Lindy, but there ain't nothin' tryin' to catch me yet. I only want to congratulate you——"

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Th' preacher was a doin' a sort of a slow dance, with McDonald a tryin' his best to hide hisself while the preacher was a tryin' to break away, an' I thinks to myself that McDonald must be turrible afraid of Ben—an' then all of a sudden I ain't got time fer thinkin' anything, fer Lindy grabs holt of me an' pulls me close to her an' starts in a talkin' as fast as she kin, an' a crowdin' Ben back of us again' th' wall.

Then th' preacher breaks away—McDonald gives a yell an' starts to run toward th' little door—some one yells, "Halt"—there's a sudden gun-shot—Lindy squeals, throws her arms around Ben's neck an' faints, an' then I sees Sergeant Thomas an' th' other Mounty a runnin' down th' aisle toward McDonald who's a sittin' on th' floor an' a groanin' with a busted arm.

What with th' drinks I've had, an' th' way things has been a happenin' I don't know whether I'm dreamin' or not, an Ben stands there with his arms around Lindy, a-lookin' plumb mystified.

Sergeant Thomas goes to McDonald an' says:

"Well, Burtis, I've been lookin' fer you a long time. Sellin' any more hooch to th' Injuns lately?"

Lindy roused up at that.

"Why—why," she yells, "he told me that Ben had been a doin' that an' if I didn't marry him he'd inform, an' have Ben sent to the penitentiary."

Just about that time me an th' two Mounties has about all we kin do to hold Ben, fer he acts like he wants to massacree McDonald—or "Burtis" fer that was his real name—but after we'd managed to persuade him to be quiet we learned that th' Mounties had been a lookin' fer Burtis fer several months, but that he'd disappeared an' they'd thought he'd left th' country.

One of th' Mounties started to lead Burtis away, an' as he passed Ben he stopped.

"——," says he. "You got th' best of it this time. I thought I was safe, havin' been hid so long that they wouldn't be lookin' fer me, an' they wouldn't have got me if it hadn't been fer you, but I ain't goin' to stay in th' pen always—don't ye fergit that. An' when I come out, I'm goin' to git you."

They hauled him away then, an' while one of 'em went to get th' marriage license changed, Lindy told us how he'd threatened to jail Ben an' how, after beggin' an' pleadin', she'd promised to marry him 'cause she couldn't bear to think of Ben bein' put in th' pen—th' danged fool! Why didn't she shoot him, or crown him with a chair or somethin'?

Well pretty soon th' preacher got back on th' job an' tied Lindy an' Ben hard an' fast, an' then we all came back to th' settlement.

Spite of Burtis bein' a crook, there ain't no way fer Ben to git back his Staten Island claim so he ain't got nothin' to give Lindy. She goes to work teachin' school again, an' he works in th' mill, or in th' timber to git things fer her.

I told him he ought to have got sense like me, an' married a squaw—then he wouldn't have to hustle to git nothin' fer her, an' what he did git, he could keep fer himself, but he says, says he:

"Why, George, you don't know what you're a-talkin' about. I've got somethin' far more precious than gold."

Huh! There ain't no such thing—'lessen it is a good squaw what kin keep things right, an' what ye kin kick —— out of when she don't do what ye tell her.

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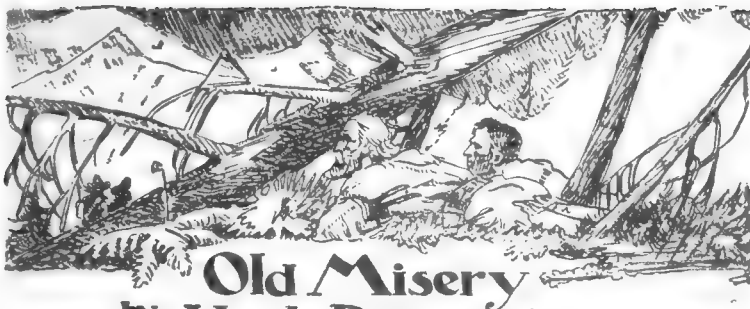

Old Misery

by Hugh Pendexter

a five-part story — part four

Author of "Red Autumn," "Long Rifles," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

"GOD help me!" groaned Joseph Gilbert to Maria the monte dealer as he saw her sweep in his last dollar. "It was not my money I lost. I am a thief!"

The young Vermonter had lost fourteen hundred dollars belonging to friends in Coloma, a mining camp in southern California.

To Maria his was simply another ludicrous case. She was accustomed to seeing men losing other people's money in gambling halls. In these flamboyant days of 1853, when the wild hilarity of the '49 gold rush had not yet checked itself, San Francisco saw many things that a more conventional time would have been shocked over.

The girl's laugh died out. Joaquin Murieta, Mexican bandit, and five masked men had entered the gambling-hall. On their heels came "Old Misery," the Man from the Mountains—Old Misery, who was the most expert knife-thrower in California.

In a twinkling Murieta had shot the lights out. In the darkness men grappled with each other helplessly. Gilbert, shaken and trembling, endeavored to escape; groping blindly, his hand found a window curtain, and he drew it back. Before he could stir, the bandits leaped through the window, each carrying a bag of gold.

In a moment Gilbert had also cleared the window sill. As he landed on the ground his hand encountered a bag, dropped by the bandits. Concealing it under his coat, he fled.

Inside, the lights on again, Old Misery faced the girl Maria.

"You ain't bad at heart, Maria," he said. "Just a trifle wild. Your grandpap won't lambast you again."

When he left he took her with him. Old Misery was accustomed to taking care of other people's troubles; this girl was going to be taken back home again.

The next morning Joseph Gilbert took the bull by the horns. In his pocket was a ticket to Sacramento. From there he would take the stage coach to Coloma. Afterward he would have to let fate take its course. In the bag he found three hundred dollars, which for the present, he felt entitled to use.

THE landing at Sacramento left Gilbert confused. Therefore it happened that he took the wrong stage coach, and as a consequence found himself bound for Nevada City. And opposite him sat Old Misery and the girl, Maria. He resigned himself to the situation; he was not anxious to reach Coloma.

In Nevada City Gilbert met Mr. Peters, the gambler exquisite. Talk concerning the raid of Joaquin Murieta and his fellows on the gambling-hall in San Francisco ran feverishly. It was being said that Murieta had been aided in his escape by a greenhorn Yankee. In desperation Gilbert confessed the whole affair to Peters.

According to Peters, there was only one thing for Gilbert to do: lay low until the thing had blown over. And after Peters had persuaded Old Misery, it was decided that Gilbert should seek refuge with the Mountain Man in his home in the foot-hills. Old Misery had finally been prevailed upon to accept the commission after his tame bear, Ben Williams, fawned upon the young man.

Just as Old Misery and Gilbert were riding out of Nevada City bound for the foot-hills, Manuel Vesequio, half-Chinese, half-Mexican, rode up behind them.

Hurriedly the breed told them that excitement had broken out in the city and a posse was being formed. Why, he said he could only imagine.

"They're after me!" gasped Gilbert.

BUT they reached Old Misery's cabin safely.

The next morning Gilbert's panic was resumed when he beheld a crowd of men coming up the slope. But they were not concerned with him. Phelps of Grass Valley, at their head, intimated

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strongly to Old Misery that he suspected him of having built his cabin in a gold mine.

Old Misery grinned broadly.

"What give you boys the notion I'd struck pay dirt up here? You know I never fuss with gold till some one else has dug and cleaned it."

After a discouraged search the invaders departed, Old Misery's mocking laugh ringing in their ears. As Gilbert and Old Misery were returning to the cabin a masked man thrust a pistol into Misery's face.

"He robbed you!" gasped Gilbert, as the horseman galloped away.

"No. Just took a peek at my medicine," was the Mountain Man's reply.

He exhibited a small bag in which he carried, about his neck, a monte card. Scrawled across the face were two words:

Joaquin-Amigo

Old Misery explained how he had once rescued Joaquin Murieta from drowning and the bandit had presented him with the card.

"I'll spoil his hide the next chance I git," Misery commented humorously.

To Gilbert's surprize he discovered that the girl Maria and her half-blind grandfather, Dom Miguel, were living in a cabin in Old Misery's clearing. Two lone prospectors also dwelt not far away. During the next few days Misery was gone on mysterious jaunts. Left alone Gilbert received hints from Maria confirming his impression that something strange was stirring in the clearing.

There also came word that Joaquin Murieta and his marauders were raiding again. Old Misery home at night, weary and lame from his curious pilgrimages, brought this news. It also amused him to know that his Nevada City neighbors suspected him of having discovered a gold-ledge. Gilbert had the impression that Misery, in spite of his queer Indian superstitions, was not quite so child-like as he appeared.

One day Misery left his little colony and went down into the valley. In time he entered Coloma. In a barroom he found a crowd of men having fun at the expense of "Pretty Soon" Jim Pipps. Misery who had known Pipps in the old days—days when he was first trying to scrape together enough money to go back home in the East, defended him.

That evening Stacy, the storekeeper was found murdered. The bartender endeavored to lay suspicion upon Pretty Soon Jim Pipps.

"Let's take a peek behind the bar," Misery suggested suspiciously.

A blood-smeared bottle was found. The bartender leaped through the window, the crowd after him. Misery departed alone. He was anxious to find Pipps and discover how he had become associated with the crime.

That night as Misery slept alongside of a cabin just outside of Caloma, he was suddenly awakened by the noise of horsemen approaching. In the dim light he saw they were Murieta's men. From their talk he knew they were after gold, buried at this spot by one of their former comrades. As they were lifting the last bag of gold from the hole they had dug, a mysterious figure loomed in the doorway of the cabin. The bandits fled, dropping one bag.

It was Pretty Soon Jim Pipps. He had been sleeping off a carouse.

Old Misery decided he would see Pipps safely on his way home. The contents of the bag would defray his expenses. They walked to the edge of the slope, where Misery said they would part for a while to meet later. Misery was becoming disturbed over the fact that his gold possessions were becoming known to the public at large.

When Old Misery thought it safe again he overtook Pretty Soon Jim. As they were preparing to have supper at Tom Tobin's old cabin in Illinoistown, a horseman rode up, who said his name was York. Misery, suspicious, directed Pretty Soon to leave the cabin that night. Shortly after Pipps' departure York entered the cabin, and after a fight in the dark, Misery killed him. The dead man was one of Joaquin Murieta's band.

Convinced that Murieta would be looking for the gold slugs which Pipps had found the night before, Misery went to Nevada City and had the slugs changed for gold dust by Peters, the gambler, who informed him that the man who had helped Murieta escape from the El Dorado was still being sought.

Pipps made his appearance, jubilant over the fact that he spent his money for a gold mine. By clever salting, Misery convinced Phelps that what he had sold as a worthless mine was really a fortune, and Phelps was only too glad to buy back at a big price. When he discovered he had had a dose of his own medicine, Phelps vowed vengeance against Old Misery.

At Grass Valley Gilbert met Lola Montez the actress, and she used him as a means to making Phelps jealous. Phelps told him he was going to marry the woman and warned him off. Maria, who was becoming increasingly fond of Gilbert was also enraged.

OLD MISERY and Tobin left Grass Valley and were trailed by Phelps' men, bent on discovering the location of the Mountain Man's gold mine. Roger, an actor in Lola Montez's company, was also with the trailers. He dropped a note for Old Misery.

At the Hotel de Paris Peters read the note to Old Misery. It warned him that Gilbert was being attacked.

By leaving Tobin at the Hotel de Paris Misery convinced his pursuers that he was also on hand; and he slipped out of town unnoticed. On his way home he encountered Ching-a-Ling who told him he had proposed to Maria and that the girl knifed him. Misery threatened violence if the breed molested the girl further.

Gilbert, who was also on his way back to Grass Hollow with provisions, met Maria and she added another warning to the ominous cloud that was gathering.

When Old Misery joined Gilbert and Maria at Grass Hollow he announced that he was going to take Gilbert away and avoid the man-hunters. The next morning when they looked for Maria she was gone.

"Only four people knew that you were in the El Dorado that night," Misery announced. "Maria told Phelps—she was mad at you about that Montez critter."

As they were leaving Grass Hollow, "Three-Finger" Jack, one of Murieta's lieutenants rode up and announced—

"Ching-a-Ling was saying that Maria is in cahoots with Murieta. Very soon he shall lose his head."

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When "Three-Finger Jack" was gone Misery told Gilbert that if Murieta failed to kill Ching-a-Ling he would do so himself. Also, that he was convinced Maria had been taken away by Murieta to resume her former wild life. Misery declared he would get Maria back, at any cost.

CHAPTER IX

OLD MIGUEL GOES TO TOWN

OLD MISERY'S first act on arriving at Grass Hollow was to produce a new suit of buckskin from a secret cache.

This he presented to Gilbert, saying:

"Time you quit them store clothes. If it needs fixing over I can do it after a fashion. If it's a fussy job Maria can do it fine."

The Vermonter was slim and wiry of build and about the mountain man's height, and when he emerged from his cabin one would have said the suit was made for him.

"Reg'lar mountain man after your h'ar grows out way natur' planned for it to," declared Old Misery, as he gazed approvingly at the trim, picturesque figure. "But it'll be some time afore your whiskers git strong."

And perhaps his thoughts flashed back across the many years to the time when all west of the Mississippi was practically an unknown country, and when he proudly was wearing his first suit of buckskin. As his old eyes grew warm perhaps it was himself he saw, youthful and greedily curious, and entering upon the strange faring that was to consume the remainder of his life.

While Gilbert walked about alone to get used to his new garments Old Misery proceeded to Miguel's cabin and whistled like an elk. Unless requested to do so he never passed through the dark doorway. Old Miguel came out, his big hat drawn well forward. Framed in the doorway behind him, and looking over his shoulder, stood the girl Maria.

Bowing low, the old Mexican greeted:

"The voice of *Señor Comandante* calls. His servant obeys. It is good to hear his voice again."

"Miguel, Time deals us new cards, and I find travel in them," began Old Misery speaking in Spanish. "My new road-medicine tells me your granddaughter must go to Mexico at once, and must stay there."

The girl gave a little cry and advanced to her grandfather's side.

"She is a bad girl again?" hissed the old man. "What has she done now, *Señor Comandante?*"

"She is a good girl and has done nothing," promptly replied the mountain man. "But a snake has told men down below that she is Ana Benites. Manuel Garcia of the crippled hand risked his life to bring word for me to send her from this place."

Old Miguel remained silent for a minute, his head bowed, his wrinkled face hidden by the broad hat-brim.

Then he threw up his head, and when he spoke his voice was as soft and caressing as a woman's, and he asked:

"The name of the snake, *Señor Comandante?* It is good for us to know so we may guard against him while on the way to Old Mexico."

"He calls himself 'Manuel Vesequio.' We call him 'Ching-a-ling.'"

The Old Mexican spat.

The girl shrilly cried:

"He is mad to tell my name! When he spoke the two words he talked his head off his shoulders!"

"So Three-Fingered Jack allowed," said the mountain man, reverting to English. "He was awfully *heyoka* when he forgot he was Joaquin Murieta's spy and betrayed you."

"Hush, thou foolish, little one," gently rebuked Miguel to the girl. "This is time for men to talk. You shall not be taken."

Then to Old Misery:

"*Señor Comandante*, your words ever have been so many kindnesses to me and this child. You have wished her well; you have given me shelter so I might die in peace. You have left it to the good God to judge me and mine. I am nearly blind. I can only feel the years pass. But it is good to die where one was born. The grass and the trees and the streams I knew when a young man, all call me. I am anxious to start. How much time have we?"

"A few hours—a few days—I do not know. Let the girl and the young Americano pack food on the mule. Let her lead you two men to a place up the ridge she knows well—a secret place where I have found nuggets of gold. I will wait here for Señor Weymouth and the sailor. When they come in I will make a smoke. She will lead you along the shoulders of the mountains. She knows the trail. After

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explaining to Señor Weymouth he and I will overtake you."

"*Madre de Diós!* Why this going up and coming down? Why must we have the *Americanos?*" cried Miguel.

"My young friend also has his name spoken. He is talked about. It is known how he helped Joaquin Murieta escape in San Francisco. Men will come to get him. I must take him over the ridge. I can not go with you. Señor Weymouth and his friend shall go with you until you are out of danger. But you must keep to the shoulders of the mountains. That is why you must hide in the little basin up the ridge until Señor Weymouth comes in."

As he talked he looked at Miguel, avoiding the girl's horrified face. The high color of her cheeks faded to old ivory as she realized her protector must have learned of her impetuous treachery. But by no glance did the mountain man intimate he knew the truth.

"God is good," piously said Miguel. "Let it be so. When the mule is packed we will start."

As he bowed and backed through the door he caught the girl by the arm and drew her inside and said something in a low, hurried voice. She cried out, as if protesting; then agreed. And by the time Old Misery had rejoined Gilbert the girl was running after him.

"I come to tell Señor Gilbert there is no place in the pines now where he can not walk," she breathlessly announced.

"It doesn't matter, Maria," he gloomily replied. "Old Misery tells me we all are to leave here at once."

"But it mus' be seen," she insisted. "It is what you call 'medicine.' "

The last was for the mountain man's benefit, for turning to him she added—

"The medicine of *El Carpentero.*"

Old Misery's interest was pricked through.

Despite the danger of loitering he eagerly exclaimed:

"Let's take a look. A bird-medicine? Cheyennes have some mighty strong bird-medicines, younker. Never dreamed old Miguel was playing up a bird-medicine. But it's just the kind in the matter of fast traveling. Go ahead, you streak of scarlet."

The girl danced the way into the pines, vanishing and reappearing between the giant boles, the red of her shoes and stockings contrasted vividly with the floor of brown needles, and her elusive leadership reminded Gilbert of wood-nymphs and other fairy people.

She started up the slope, and the mountain man called to her:

"No time for sight-seeing. What you making up there for?"

The girl veered to the left and bore back toward her cabin. She halted directly back of the cabin, and this time Gilbert found no gnome-like figure barring his close approach to the group of big pines.

Old Misery was impatient for Miguel and the young people to be traveling away from the hollow.

She interrupted his brusk reminders by crying:

"Is not that the work of a greedy one? *El Carpentero?* But where is Señor Robber Squirrel?"

And she pointed to several of the big pines, whose smooth sections of bark up to a height of five feet appeared to be studded with pegs.

"Woodpeckers that'll store nuts so close to the ground must be *heyoka,*" grumbled Old Misery. "Come, come, you streak of scarlet! If it's a bird-medicine show how it works. I knew a Cheyenne man who had a master strong swallow-medicine. Is this a woodpecker-medicine?"

The girl reached down and drew the slender knife from her garter and advanced to a tree, removed the cup of an acorn, and smiled triumphantly over her shoulder at the men.

"Plumb *heyoka!*" exclaimed Old Misery. "There ain't no nut! Fool bird forgot to put in a nut!"

"This is the nut, *Señor Comandante,*" she replied.

And scooping the point of her blade into the bark she removed a small nugget of gold.

Very proudly she explained:

"My wicked old grandfather is a ver' wise *caballero.* When his eyes were good he had seen *El Carpentero* store nuts in trees. The gold he brought to this hollow is in these trees. He tells me to dig them out to take to Mexico."

"Well, dog my cats!" spluttered Old Misery in disgust. "And I was never *wakan* 'nough to notice the carpenter and the squirrels never done any fighting in here! I s'posed it was a medicine-place,

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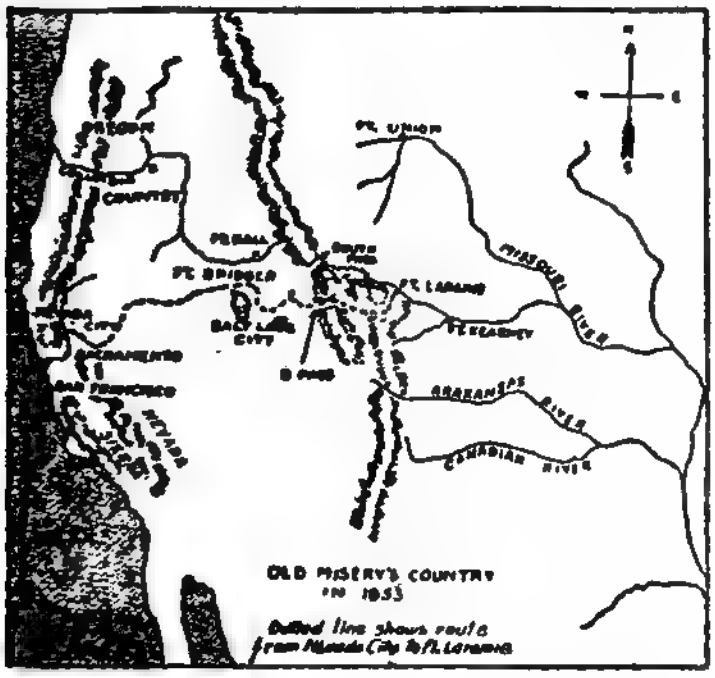
and kept clear. And yet, at a distance, I've noticed the trees was pitted with what looked to be heads of acorns. Never s'pected why Miguel borrered my auger. Lawd! But wouldn't Tom Tobin laff if he knew I was such a thick-head! If they grow any thicker heads in Vermont, younker, I'm sorry for 'em. Take my knife and git to work. We oughter be beating a rawhide drum and singing our travel-song like a Kiowy."

Gilbert was nervous over the delay and momentarily expected a harsh voice to call out for him to put up his hands. He grabbed the long knife and fell to work aiding the girl. And, whereas he was awkward and her fingers were nimble, he was surprized to find he was removing two nuggets to her one. As he excavated the treasure he was remembering the gold was loot and doubtless blood-stained.

He knew old Miguel had lived outside the law and had forayed stirrup to stirrup with



wicked men. Any nugget he dropped into the buckskin bag at the girl's girdle might stand for a murder; and he found himself loath to touch them, and glancing at his fingers to see if they left a stain. She worked as daintily as if handling wedding-china.

He found himself casting her side-glances and marveling how one guilty of treachery and now standing in imminent peril of breaking her own slim neck could be so blithe and merry. She spilled some of the nuggets and laughed shrilly as she dropped on her knees and lost minutes hunting for them.

Old Misery, reclining on the brown needles and smoking his pipe, watched her with puzzled eyes. Her merriment in the presence of the man she had betrayed was beyond his comprehension. Then he grew annoyed and a bit worried at the time required in recovering the nuggets.

He rose and roughly announced:

"No more of this, Maria. We ain't at the rendezvous in Pierre's Hole, cel'brating the close of the beaver season. T'other night I dreamed of bloody foot-prints— Yet that couldn't a been it— They was leading away from the holler and down the ridge. Come, come! Git to work packing the mule, Maria. If there's any gold you've overlooked your grandfather can set the price and I'll make it up with honest nuggets."

And he started for the opening.

"Jus' one leetle minute, *Señor Comandante*," she pleaded. "Jus' one more!"

And she rose on tiptoe and tried to reach a cache. Nervous to be with the mountain man and on his way up the ridge, Gilbert attempted to secure the nugget for her, but she persisted, and told him:

"Hold me up a bit, Señor Gilbert. I am not very heavy."

He easily lifted her and held her while she removed the topmost nugget.

As she lightly dropped back to the needles she explained:

"The first my grandfather hid. He jumped up like a monkey and caught the stub of the branch and made the hole with one hand. Hees eyes were better then."

"Yes, yes," he impatiently muttered. "But let's be going."

"I wanted *Señor Comandante* to go away so I could say: 'Forgeeve. I am ver' sorry! I am a ver' bad girl. It is in my blood to hate where I love.'"

"It's all right," he mumbled. "I didn't tell. He guessed it after you ran away from the cabin. You're all right, Maria; but for God's sake let's get out of this trap!"

"Come along! Come along!" harshly called the mountain man. "Want them to be piling in here and bagging you two like a brace of quail?"

"It was not for the gold, but ask you to forgeeve," she whispered, as they made to obey the summons; and she hurled the last nugget among the trees and walked with bowed head before him.

Old Misery was making a selection from

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the supplies brought from Grass Valley. Without waiting to be told the girl brought up the mule and deftly arranged the small pack, to which the mountain man added a generous supply of blankets. When all was ready he ordered—

"Go inside, Maria, and get your grandpap."

She was gone several minutes and Misery was softly cursing when she reappeared alone and announced—

"*Señor Comandante*, he is not in there."

"—— a fiddle!" the mountain man exploded. "Take you all this time to see that cabin was empty? But where is he? In all the time he's lived here he's stuck like beaver-tail glue to that cabin. Gone? Call him! You can call him, can't you?"

She raised her voice in a shrill ululating cry, but though they waited and she repeated the signal several times old Miguel failed to show himself. The mountain man was worried and angry.

"Pretty works!" he growled. "Howsomever, *he* ain't wanted by any committee—yet. We must make a start. I reckon he'll come back here. I'll come down and fetch him. But of all the cussed notions for a blind man to take! He's *heyoka*."

"Maybe he started up the hollow," suggested the girl. "His eyes are ver' poor, but his feet can follow a trail. In the cabin he asked where we would go and I said up this valley. We will find him somewhere ahead. Is it not?"

Fuming and fretting at the unaccountable disappearance of the Mexican, the mountain man aroused Bill Williams from his lair under the ledge and took the lead. But they saw no signs of old Miguel. Now feeling safe against a surprize visit, Misery halted and said:

"See here, younkers. That old fool's plumb lost. If he come this far he tried to leave the valley and he couldn't find any path. Feet couldn't tell him anything. Maria, you know the way to the basin. Take Double-Time up there. I'll come along soon. Bill Williams will go along with you—Bill, if they need any help you lend 'em a paw."

"Beel Williams will make a good duenna," she laughingly replied.

And the two men wondered that she could accept the disappearance of her grandfather so lightly.

"Go ahead!" shortly commanded Old Misery.

But as the girl led the mule forward the mountain man caught Gilbert's sleeve and horsely whispered:

"You must think for both. She's only a little child in the form of a woman."

"God forbid I should ever forget. I'm not as bad as that."

"You're all right; but sometimes a man gits *heyoka* if he looks too long at a new moon, or into a squaw's eyes. But you're all right. Make no smokes —hark!"

The girl already had heard it and had abandoned the mule to efface herself behind a tree. Old Misery motioned for Gilbert to seek a similar hiding-place. Then he ran ahead and stood by the mule. A loud voice, sounding below them and on their left, became more audible. The mountain man's figure lost its rigidity, and in deep relief he cried:

"Just the fellers I've been hankering to see! Lawd! But ain't he lacing it to Sailor Ben!"

Now the speech of Weymouth Mass was growing intelligible, and for one so self-contained his remarks to the sailor evidenced anger.

"You worthless hunk!" boomed the deep voice. "I'll bleed you white but what I get the rum out of your veins. Just as we were about to strike it you have to pretend your luck is calling you back to Grass Hollow. You'll get no rum there, and you'll get no chance to sneak away down to the towns. I'll break both your bandy legs before I'll let them take you into temptation!"

"Avast! Heave short!" grumbled the husky voice of the sailor. "Sky—foc'sle blown to ribbons."

"I'll 'avast' you, you deep-water scum! For two seasons you've led me a dog's life. For two seasons you've worked hard to spoil your luck when if you'd given it free rein we both would be richer than old Philadelphius, who got eighty-six million dollars together. No need of me reminding he didn't trust to no drunken old dog like you, Sailor Ben."

"Belay! Heave-to!" growled the sailor.

They crashed from the growth, the sailor rolling ahead and Weymouth Mass striding behind him, his heavy voice pouring forth a flood of carefully enunciated objurgations. He displayed no surprize

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on beholding Old Misery but at once announced:

"This drink-loving reptile has tried my patience for the last time, Misery. I'm going to ham-string him."

"Belay," groaned the sailor, dropping on the ground and rubbing his tired legs.

Weymouth fanned himself with his hat and bitterly explained:

"Deserted me in my hour of need, Misery. Deserted me just as his luck was beginning to work! We'd struck color in an old water course and he was pointing up the ridge and breathing hard——"

"Breeze fell. Luck all right," broke in the sailor wearily. "Come in to freshen ballast."

"You're trying to make him believe what you told me," upbraided Weymouth Mass. "Trying to make him believe your luck was calling you back to Grass Hollow, you—you derelict!"

"Aye, aye, sir. But soft on the bad names, cap'n."

"There, Misery! He confesses! You can see——"

"Wait a minute," gravely interrupted Old Misery, his eyes serious and respectful as he gazed at the sullen sailor. "That name you give Ben wa'n't called for. Weymouth, that feller's *wakan witshasha.* I've been hankering most keen you two would come; and here you be. Younkers, step out here."

And Weymouth Mass and Ben were startled by the sudden appearance of Maria and Gilbert.

Old Misery hastily explained:

"Sailor Ben has proved his luck is mighty strong medicine. It's fetched you here when I needed you most. It's going to take you to some rich diggings. Always intended you should have 'em; now the time has come. And, Weymouth, when you're trailing luck don't try to hamper it. It's just like a *mahopa* Minnetaree. May wander and act mighty queer. But hands off, and watch it.

"This is what you must do: Go with the girl and the younker to a rocky little basin she'll take you to. Dig. Lots of nuggets. Old river bed. May lead back up the ridge to the mother-lode. I'll turn back and hunt for old Miguel. He's wandered off somewhere. When I fetch him to the basin you'll have to quit digging and go on a trip for me. Then you can come back and clean up. And after you git tired of placer-mining you can tackle that ledge where Bill Williams sleeps. It's rotten with gold. All I ask is that Peters gits a third. There's enough for you all."

"Merciful Heavens!" gasped Weymouth Mass. "Mr. Ben, I humbly apologize."

But Ben was asleep.

Arousing the sailor, Old Misery told him to go with the girl and Gilbert. As the little procession, including Bill Williams, moved on the mountain man detained Weymouth Mass and hurriedly explained the situation, and won his promise to take the girl to Mexico, or close enough to the line to insure her against capture.

"The river gold up in the basin and the ledge in the holler will pay you for your bother," he concluded. "And one-third for Peters."

"Why, Misery, old friend! You don't have to pay me. I'll take the girl to Mexico, or South America, safe and sound. As for the gold, let Ben and me have a fifth. We'll work it and turn over to you——"

"Not if you're my friend," broke in Old Misery. "I've told you I'm going to take the younker over the ridge. He and me may wander round a bit. Feeling sorter cur'ous to see if the Forks of the Missouri look like they did when I was last up there. But I'll let you give him a little present, so's he can make a feast if he goes back home. If he turns mountain man he won't need any gold. If he does I know where to find it."

"He'll never gamble again. I'll swear it," defended Weymouth.

"I was thinking of women. He's too honest to be running without hobbles. A woman might make a worse fool of him then gambling ever would—good-hearted. Took care of me when he thought I was on a spree. But green, Weymouth, greener 'n you'll ever be. Now what's that streak of scarlet mean by scooting back here?"

The last referred to the sudden appearance of Maria, who was running swiftly through the timber down the slope. She was panting for breath when she came to a halt before the two men. With a gesture she requested Old Misery to step one side. When she could speak she explained:

"The sailor, Beel Williams and Señor Gilbert and the mule are waiting. I forgot to tell you something, *Señor Comandante.* It is about my wicked old grandfather. There

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is no need for you to look for him. He has gone to find Manuel Vesequio and punish him for speaking the name of Ana Benites. My grandfather is ver' angry that Vesequio should betray me to the *Americanos*. When he is finished in Nevada City he will come back to the hollow and make a smoke signal and I will come down the ridge and lead him up to the basin. Then for Mexico."

"——! Forgot to tell me!" roared Old Misery. "You knew this all the time and kept shet!"

"My grandfather told me to say nothing. You told me to obey my grandfather when you brought me back from the bay," she naively defended herself.

"You killed time a-purpose with them tree-nuggets to give him a chance to sneak off. And you know he's helpless and can't find his way anywhere."

"It was his command, *Señor Comandante*. You have told me to obey him. It is in his blood to pay the man who betrayed me. I could not stop him if I wished. His knife burns in his sash till he wipes out that treachery. Hate will be his eyes. Hate will lead him safe to Nevada City. Love for *Señor Comandante* will lead him back to Grass Hollow," she gravely argued. "I tell you this so you will not waste time hunting in the woods. By now he is far down the ridge."

"And you held your tongue till you believed he had too much of a start to be overtaken. Even if he makes Nevada City he will stand no chance with Ching-a-ling. A blind man fighting a seeing man! Even if he stood a chance he will get there too late. Afore now one of that —— Joaquin's men has settled the breed's hash. Go back and lead them to the basin. Stay there till I come."

He strode rapidly down the little hollow until he came to the camp. Then he halted before the cage containing the wolf-pups and mused:

"Some root 'n' grass Injun may take your hides for leggings, but I'll give you your chance. If you've l'arned any medicine from me mebbe you'll keep clear."

And he opened the cage and let the frisky animals go free.

He watched them nose about the camp, as if uncertain as to what they should do with their freedom. Then instinct whispered to them, and with furtive, padding step they vanished in the gloomy timber. Proceeding to the cage of panther-kittens, he turned them loose. Without any hesitancy they fled to the dark growth. He walked after them a bit and tried to call them to him; but they were wild folks now and belonged to the spacious outdoors.

"Better'n selling 'em," he muttered.

Next he visited the chained bear and examined the teeth.

"Your mouth's dangerous, younker," he told the cub; and he unfastened the collar.

The bear made straight for the girl-bear and engaged in good-natured rough-and-tumble play. Tiring of their fun, or because the released captive associated the hollow with restricted freedom, the male trotted into the pines, the female following him.

Old Misery stared after them thoughtfully, then commented:

"—— of a way to say good-by. Reg'lar Injuns."

Sweeping his gaze over the deserted camp, he started on the trail of old Miguel, whose age and failing sight could never slack the inborn lust for vengeance. And as he swung down the slope he told himself:

"Just like a Comanche. Nothing but blood will wipe it out. Good camp. Easy life. All knocked to —— along of a girl's whim. Mebbe that's the way my medicine is working to git me back over the ridge. Knew something was going to bust when I picked up that *Tunkan* rock at Illinois-town."

And he hummed the Teton Sioux medicine song, "The Sacred Stones Come to See You," and felt a surge of impatience to be east of the Sierra and working his way through the Humboldt Mountains to rediscover old scenes visited in his youth when he was one of General Ashley's men.

IT WAS evening when the mountain man entered Nevada City and began his search for old Miguel. He did not care to be recognized and kept much to the shadows as he worked along toward the Chinese store, kept by Ching-a-ling.

He did not anticipate any trouble if recognized by those seeking Gilbert, and who knew that young man went up the ridge in his company. But such a meeting would necessitate leaving a false trail and a return to the little basin by a roundabout course. He was confident, however, he

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could enter and leave town without being recognized, and this assurance he attributed to his new rock-medicine. Only one thing worried him, the true meaning of his dream wherein he saw bloody foot-prints leaving the Grass Hollow camp.

He avoided the street crowds as much as possible, and yet soon realized there was an unusual number of men tramping along Broad and Main, often walking four abreast. At the intersections of streets large groups milled around some loud-voiced speaker.

The citizens were not indulging in a celebration but appeared much in earnest in their tramping back and forth.

No one had eyes for the gray ghost of a figure gliding from doorway to doorway, nor did Old Misery care to ask any questions. He heard angry exclamations, consisting of threats to "hang them yet," and the like, but he did not learn the cause of the excitement until he was forced to halt by a compact mass of men blocking the street corner where he had planned to turn off and strike for the breed's store.

The aimless marching back and forth now seemed to have arrived at a common purpose, and small streams of citizens were feeding into the street to take part in a mass meeting. The gathering mob was ominously quiet, waiting for a leader.

Some one kicked a barrel into the cleared space, and a citizen leaped upon it and shouted:

"I tell you Joaquin Murieta wasn't with 'em! 'Dutch' Joe knows him by sight. He seen the raiders after they killed the two herders and drove off the hosses. They passed close by where he was hiding——"

The head of the barrel collapsed as the orator stressed his remarks with heavy stamps. Ordinarily his dropping through the barrel would have caused shouts of merriment and much derision, but the temper of the gathering was evidenced by the silence that greeted the mishap. The man crawled from the barrel and backed into the crowd.

"We're wasting too much time doing nothing," yelled another citizen, who did not step from the ranks. "Let's do our own regulating. There's enough men in Nevada City to overtake the rascals."

From the outskirts of the gathering some one shouted:

"Mr. Peters! Mr. Peters!"

The cry was caught up and repeated as the gambler was recognized. He worked his way through the mass and stepped into the little opening. He waited for the shouting to subside, and as he waited he indulged in his old habit of shuffling coins as if they were so many cards.

"Two men have been murdered and twenty horses have been stolen," he quietly began. "It's quite useless to chase the raiders. They have made a score of miles by this time and before you can overtake them they will scatter and make for a rendezvous. They will leave one or two men to drive the horses over the ridge into the Carson Valley.

"We want the men who killed the herders. We want the men back of them who are the brains of the outfit. I suggest that a small, well-armed and determined band of men be selected to ride south for the San Joaquin Valley, striking straight for Corral Hollow Cañon on the western edge, where it's known Murieta has one of his central camps. If the bandits are not there let the posse ride on to Cantua Creek below the Fresno, where Murieta has had a big camp. A second posse should ride direct to Saw Mill Flat near the Stanislaus.

"This is work for Nevada City men. I will ride with the first posse, and Nevada City will be pleased to have any gentlemen from Marysville, Sacramento or the bay go along with us. Let half a dozen ranchers or men who know the Sierra country between here and Carson Valley, ride to inspect the mountain passes. The stolen horses can be easily traced if prompt action is taken. They will not be strongly guarded until they reach the Carson, where there must be a strong camp.

"If any men from down the river or the bay are here I'll be glad to hear from them. We should ride at once."

A well-dressed man advanced through the group and briefly explained:

"I was sent up here by our committee at the bay. I am a merchant and not a horseman. Several who came with me are profiting by information I have picked up and even now are on their way to arrest one of Joaquin's band, a young man, an Englishman, who aided the bandit to escape from Frisco a short time ago.

"My friends also expect to capture a woman member of the band, and from her we expect to learn enough to put an end to Murieta's deviltry. Were I a horseman I

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should be glad to ride south with either posse."

"Hurrah for the committee! We'll all work together!" cried the man who had fallen through the barrel.

Mr. Peters inquired of the merchant:

"You believe your information is correct? That you're not arousing false hopes?"

"Positive. Men sent out ahead of me learned certain things, but could get nowhere. On the way up I met one of your citizens, a James Pipps; he was in bonanza and going home. Without realizing the importance of his talk—he had been drinking—he told things that allowed me to put all our information together. I can assure you that within two days my friends will ride into Nevada City with two important prisoners."

Old Misery saw Mr. Peters back into the crowd and disappear. Many questions were hurled at the San Francisco merchant. Men began talking in groups.

From the edge of the crowd Mr. Peters shouted—

"All men owning good horses and straight-shooting guns meet me at Kelly's lodging-house an hour before sun-up tomorrow."

Old Misery turned to a man standing close by and asked:

"What's this all about? Whose hosses is missing? I just come along. First I've heard of it."

"From Adams' ranch. Run off in broad daylight. Who'n —— be you?" The last was sharp with suspicion; and the stranger tugged the end of his long mustache and leaned forward to stare into the mountain man's face.

"I'm the feller who never stole any hosses," meekly replied Old Misery, backing away.

The man instantly shouted:

"This way! One of the thieves 'n' murderers right here! I've got him!"

Those nearest blocked Old Misery's retreat. The stranger leaped forward and clutched the fringed cape of the hunting-shirt, but quickly became immobile as he felt the muzzle of a navy Colt pressed against his stomach. The two were hedged in by citizens.

Without removing his gaze from the fellow's startled visage the mountain man called out:

"Some of you know me. Peters is my friend. Fetch him, and he'll tell you all that I ain't stealing any hosses this season; just selling b'ars."

"I know him. He's Old Misery," spoke up a storekeeper. "He's the grizzly-bear man. He's all right."

"Mr. Peters! Mr. Peters!" yelled a dozen voices.

The gambler must have lingered in the crowd after calling for a rendezvous of horsemen, for he quickly came plowing his way forward. And he must have heard the storekeeper's endorsement, for without asking any questions he clapped a hand on the mountain man's shoulder and loudly declared:

"This man is my friend. He's all right. All white and a yard wide."

"Thanky kindly, Peters," said Old Misery. "But who's this cuss who's so mighty pert to name me a hoss-thief? Mebbe you'd best look him up a bit and see where he trails in here from."

"You cut the ace! Who knows this man?" demanded the gambler.

Old Misery belted his gun and grinned sardonically at his perturbed accuser. Face after face was thrust forward, and man after man denied having ever seen the fellow.

"Search him!" directed Mr. Peters.

The man was dragged to a lighted window and his pockets emptied. There was nothing found of an incriminating nature except two gold rings, plain bands like wedding rings. These were tried on his fingers and were found to be much too small.

Before he could be questioned he hoarsely declared:

"I bought 'em for my woman. Man said he was hard up and would sell 'em cheap. That's Gawd's truth."

"Your neck depends on your being able to prove it," grimly the gambler informed him. "Put him in a strong room. We'll find out later where he was when the ranch was raided, and where his woman lives."

"I don't know anything about the ranch except what I've heard here tonight," cried the stranger. "Then this old feller that looks like a hoss-thief——"

With a wild whoop Old Misery leaped upon him and would have beaten him to the ground had not the onlookers pulled him back.

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"I'll have his ha'r!" cried the mountain man. "Peters, I'll have that skunk's mangy fur, I'm telling you!"

"Be quiet and be good," commanded the gambler, drawing him away. "You take a walk and cool your blood. No street brawling here till after the fellow's let loose. Then comb him if you want to."

And as if to get his friend away before he could renew his assault on the stranger—now being hustled to a place of safekeeping—the gambler led Old Misery out of hearing and announced—

"——'s to pay!"

"I heard the man from the bay talk," said Old Misery. "But his friends won't find even a tame wolf-pup at my camp. Everything cleaned out."

"Whew! That's good hearing. I was sweating blood when that Frisco man was talking. Trying to find some one in the crowd I could trust to send up the ridge with a warning to you when you had that rumpus. It's true; they're hot foot after young Ounce-Diggings and that girl. By this time the Frisco storekeeper has learned who you are, and he'll probably blab to some of the men that his friends are riding for your camp and that you're a man to be trailed. They'll comb that camp and surrounding country for the two youngsters."

"Like ——!" jeered Old Misery. "Might as well search the Rockies for a bullet some one lost there two years ago. As for trailing me, they want to make a new medicine first. Now, listen: I come here to find old Miguel."

And he briefly explained Ching-a-ling's treachery and the Mexican's errand to the town.

"Haven't seen him. Scarcely any one here knows him. But if he comes to town he'll be locked up. Every greaser is under suspicion on account of the double murder at Adams' *rancho*. I didn't know Ching-a-ling had betrayed the girl. Supposed he had blabbed on the youngster. And I didn't know that till tonight as I've been down to Marysville for a few days."

"Miguel will try to git at Ching-a-ling."

"No use. He's staying in his store mighty close, scared blue, and two men are guarding him. He was promised protection if he would tell what he knew. Your Mexican can't get at him. You must steal away. They'll try to trail you."

"Reckon I'm on a fool hunt," muttered Old Misery. "Blind old cuss would have hard work getting down here, let alone finding the breed's place. He's like a Comanche; only blood will rub it out. I'll be mizzling afore more folks can call me a thief. Walk along a bit till I can scoot."

The excitement attending the arrest and imprisonment of the stranger afforded them cover for a retreat. They turned a corner, and Mr. Peters rubbed his eyes and discovered he was walking alone.

With a foolish grin he turned back and was soon met by the San Francisco merchant, who hurriedly asked:

"Where's your aged friend? It's very important I should speak to him."

"Gone. Started back home. Anything I can tell you?"

"He should know he has been harboring two persons, man and woman, who are wanted for being members of Murieta's band."

"Then why in the —— didn't you tell us that when you and your friends first arrived here?" hotly demanded the gambler.

"Well, it would have been better if we'd told you," admitted the merchant. "But Murieta has so many spies in the camps and towns that we feared word would be sent that our men were on the trail."

In the meanwhile Old Misery was groping his way along the rear of several stores, working around and between empty barrels and boxes and mounds of bottles and discarded clothing, his line of advance taking him toward the back end of the Chinese store.

It was dark, and he dared not risk discovery by attempting haste. At last he halted at the back of the store. He ran his hands over the boards but found no door. Creeping to the corner, he peered around and toward the street. Near him was a man seated on a box. As he watched the man called out:

"Slow work, Tim. Wish they'd relieve us, or bring us a drink."

A voice in front of the store replied:

"The yellow rat doesn't deserve to be protected. Giving away a woman's mighty poor business."

Old Misery decided he had made every effort and should be retiring. But to return up the ridge and report to the girl that he had found no signs of old Miguel was difficult for him to do. He sat down and weighed the situation carefully. If the old

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man had entered the town he would have been locked up, and Mr. Peters would have known that fact. Either he had lost his way entirely, or was entering under cover of night. If the latter, he would make for the store.

The side door was unbolted, and Old Misery returned to the corner. He heard the breed in English invite:

"Will not my brave guards have a drink from the bottle? It is the best brandy in California. Guards should be alert, but one drink can not harm."

"Go to ——!" growled the guard who had complained of being "dry."

The door softly closed, then opened, and the breed was anxiously asking:

"Why are they shouting? I hear men shouting."

Old Misery was also hearing it, a confusion of many voices from the center of the town. The man in front of the store called out:

"Something's busted loose, Charley. We're missing some fun."

"Maybe it's a fire, Tim."

And the guard at the side door rose and walked toward Old Misery. The mountain man barely had time to retire behind a barrel before "Charley" was at the corner, staring about for a red glare.

Several pistol shots rang out, followed by wild outcries. Charley turned and ran rapidly to the front of the store. Old Misery was impatient to witness the excitement, but prudence warned him to avoid recognition as he must be out of the town and traveling back to the hidden basin before daylight.

The yelling of many voices continued, and there came a second ragged volley of pistol shots. The clamor was approaching the store, and thudding through it sounded the hoofs of a galloping horse. From the corner of the building the mountain man saw the two guards run into the road and call on a horseman to halt. Two quick reports was their answer, and the rider was spurring his steed up the eastern slope.

A mob of infuriated citizens swept up the street. The foremost found Tim cursing violently and nursing a broken arm, while his companion was trying to explain that only surprize stopped him from returning the horseman's fire.

That Ching-a-ling was much alarmed by the shouting and shooting was suggested to Old Misery as he heard a sharp outcry from inside the store. The van of the mob sped on, the front line emptying their revolvers into the darkness ahead. From the broken talk of those who followed to witness the stirring chase Old Misery at his corner overheard enough to understand the situation. His accuser had made a bold dash for liberty and had escaped on another man's horse.

"Clever cuss! Out-Injuned 'em," he murmured.

That Ching-a-ling's nerves were badly frayed was further evidenced by a heavy crash inside the store. Then the mountain man realized that the guards had left their posts without being relieved.

"I promised him what I'd do if he bothered her," muttered Old Misery. "He give the girl away. She was living straight. He give her away, and she must go back to Murieta's crowd. And I told him what I'd do if he troubled her again. I'll give him a square show, and that's more'n he gave her, or ever gave any man, woman or child. But he didn't oughter be turned loose to hurt other folks."

And he crept along the building to the side door.

The street in front of the store was thick with excited men and women. Old Misery drew his knife and leaned against the door and watched to see that none was looking his way. He heard a slight noise beyond the thin boards. It sounded as if Ching-a-ling was crouching there and trying to subdue his heavy breathing. Thinking the man was about to come out, the mountain man drew aside.

A minute passed and nothing happened.

He slowly counted sixty, then reached up and tried the catch and felt the door give. He pushed it gently inward, but it would open only part way. There was no pressure to close it. He reached his arm around the door, and his fingers closed on something. Drawing it forth, his sense of touch identified it as a big Mexican hat.

Then the truth flashed home. With no further hesitation he rose and slipped through the narrow aperture and with the toe of his moccasin located the owner of the hat. The figure was inert, and he knew the man was dead. There remained the victor; and now the mountain man drew his knife again and knew he must keep his promise to Ching-a-ling, or die.

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Moving noiselessly he passed into the living-room back of the store. Odors of musk and Oriental scents offended his nostrils. With his knife advanced and revolving in a narrow circle, with his free hand holding his hat out one side to ward off an attack from that direction, he sidled along the wall, moving to the left. His foot touched some object.

He waited several minutes and could hear no sound except his own soft, slow breathing. He did not believe any human being could remain cooped up with him in such close quarters without betraying his presence. His nostrils twitched, again offended. Suddenly he stooped and with his free hand felt of the object his foot had hit. It was a parcel wrapped in a cloth, and by the fringe he decided the covering was a shawl. Throwing back the corners of the shawl, he investigated with light fingers, and with the first contact he was standing erect and exclaiming under his breath:

"The bloody-minded ——! Just like a Comanche! Only blood could rub it out. They fit to the death in the darkness, neither having any 'vantage! But to cut off his head and planning to take it away in a shawl!"

Without any further attempt at stealth he located the decapitated remains of Ching-a-ling. Old Miguel had completed his business despite the guards. Returning to the side entrance, the mountain man swiftly brushed his fingers over the wrinkled face of the Mexican. The knife was still clutched in the lifeless hand. Misery's searching fingers found three fearful stab-wounds; one in the side and two in the chest. And yet the former outlaw had willed to live until he had slain the breed and had hacked off his head!

By the time he had regained the street and was hurrying away from the town the mountain man had reconstructed the horrible tragedy. The old Mexican had cunningly timed his arrival. In some way he had located the store and had learned that two guards were posted there. With the patience of an Indian he had waited. He had seized the first opportunity—when the guards were in front of the store to learn the cause of the shooting—and had entered by the side door.

He had found the breed in the dark room and had received three thrusts before giving the mortal stroke. Ching-a-ling had cried out on discovering the identity of his visitor, or else when meeting death. Old Miguel, although rapidly bleeding to death, had carried through his gruesome program. In making for the door he had lurched against something and knocked it over. He had collapsed at the door, and it was his last gasping breath that Old Misery had heard.

"Pretty works!" muttered Old Misery. "And what'll Nevada City think when it finds the two of 'em?"

CHAPTER X

"LIKE A WOLF I ROAM"

THE sun required yet another hour to climb to the crest of the Sierra as Old Misery limped up the narrow, rocky channel leading to the basin. He carried a large pack and two rifles; and he was glad to rest for a bit when he reached the lower end of the basin. The glow in the eastern sky revealed the camp of the three men and the girl—four mounds of blankets on the grass near the tiny mountain stream.

A larger mound at some distance from the sleeper, stirred and rose to four feet; and Bill Williams came sniffling toward his master. The mountain man advanced, threw down his pack and guns, fondled his pet's head and gave him a chew of tobacco. It was the girl Maria who first sensed his approach. She sat up and threw aside her blankets, then rose and ran to meet him.

"*Señor Comandante* comes back—without my grandfather," she whispered.

"He won't came back any more," he bluntly announced. "Rubbed out, fighting with the breed, Ching-a-ling."

"*Madre de Dios!* What words to bring me!" she hissed. "Then the granddaughter goes! She has eyes. She has a knife. She is young—not a poor old blind man."

"Ching-a-ling is dead. Your grandpap did for him after gitting his own quittance. The camp in Grass Holler is filled with men, looking for you and the younker."

"He keeled Vesequio? Ah, that is good! Is it not? My grandfather was an old man. He would die ver' soon, keeled by the years. Many times he has said each year is so much more weight on his shoulders. Rest his soul! He struck me many times. But I forgeeve. He was a ver'

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brave old *caballero*. He keeled the man who insult me. The men below? Can they find us here?"

"We must be leaving as soon as we eat," he told her. "By sun-up they'll be spreading out and hunting. They can't find us by follering any trail; they might stumble upon us. Nearly walked my legs off gitting here. Nevada City has started posses after Murieta. This time they'll get him. Just as sure as if he'd dreamed of snakes, or the moon. Mexico is the place for you."

"Pouf! Never will they catch Don Joaquin Murieta. If they catch me he will come and take me from them."

"If they catch you they might stretch your slim neck. Murieta couldn't free you. The younker must go over the ridge. They're hunting him as well as you."

Weymouth Mass stirred uneasily and opened his eyes.

"Back again," he rumbled, and his deep, booming voice brought Gilbert from his dreams.

Old Misery briefly repeated what he had told the girl and directed that food be prepared and a start made at once. Weymouth Mass did not seem to apprehend any danger and was loath to leave the basin.

"We've begun uncovering the top soil and we've found one small nest of nuggets already. I put them in a bag for Gilbert."

"But the men in Coloma!" cried Gilbert. "What will they be thinking? I'm branded as a thief by this time! I can't go home. I can't go anywhere under my own name. I'd rather stay and risk capture!"

"Easy and simple as lifting the back-fat out of a buf'ler," declared Old Misery. "I've fetched a good rifle for you. We'll pick up some hosses after we git over the ridge. And a pack-mule. Once we git 'em we'll own all outdoors. Turn mountain man and live as you was made to live. Walk along the Rockies and see things. Work only for yourself. No one west the Mississippi will care a hoot to know your name or hist'ry. I'll make you into a prime mountain man."

Gilbert stared with defeated eyes at the mountain man.

Misery eagerly continued:

"I know all the ground. We'll find Tom Tobin and have some fun. I'm getting old and cantank'rous. You can look after me a trifle."

"Señor Gilbert can not go East. He can not stay in California. Let him go to Mexico where he will be called a great man for helping Don Murieta," softly urged the girl.

Old Misery glanced with worried eyes from one to the other, and conceded:

"Here is his new rifle and a small bag of nuggets. It is for him to say."

The Vermonter shook his head dismally.

"I can't leave the United States. If I must lose myself, give up my name, and be thought a thief, at least I'll stay in the country."

"Spoken like a mountain man!" cried Old Misery. "And all —— can't drive you out the Rockies, or from the plains. And you'll meet lots of folks who don't wear the names first saddled on 'em. Plenty of room to begin a new life. My offer of five dollars a day still holds. You've earned it most reg'lar right up to now. We'll notch a stick and bimeby you'll have 'nough money to square off that debt. You can take it back East and let on you was captured by Injuns and just managed to bust loose. Tell 'em you stumbled on the Lost Cabin mine and dug 'nough gold to make up for what the reds took from you afore you could carry it to Coloma."

"If he could only stay here for a while we'd soon have enough gold to make up for his mistake," spoke up Weymouth Mass.

"We're staying just long enough to eat and pack the mule. You folks will take the mule. Double-Time 'n me are off over the ridge and down the Truckee River to the immigrant road. Rest of you follow along the ridge, keeping down to 'bout this level. Keep well up when you reach the head of the San Joaquin; for posses will be combing the valley. Maria, I'd like to have you take Bill Williams along with you. Some greenhorn, or Pike, will shoot him if he goes with me. He's good medicine to have. He's *mato-wapiya*, or grizzly-bear medicine."

"He is a ver' gran' *caballero*," quickly agreed the girl. "He shall go with me to Mexico. No one will shoot the friend of Ana Benites down there."

Sailor Ben woke up, staggered to his feet and hoarsely growled:

"Stand by to repel boarders. What's the lookout see?"

"We're off to Mexico. No more digging till we come back," Weymouth Mass informed him.

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This intelligence seemed to please the sailor. Chanting an old sea-song deep in his hairy throat, he endeavored to forward the breakfast by collecting bits of dry fuel. After giving orders that only the driest of the fuel be used Old Misery went to the lower end of the basin and stood watch while the breakfast was being prepared.

He was glad to be leaving the coast, and yet he had been there many pleasant months. He stared long and intently down toward the broad valley of the Sacramento and recalled the days when New Helvetia, Sutter's post, controlled what was now the north half of the State. He had seen Yerba Buena magically change from a sleepy hamlet to a mighty city. There was pathos in the thought of leaving it all, and yet he was glad to go.

He had seen Sacramento spring up along the marsh of the river and become a metropolis in itself, and even worse for rats than San Francisco. He had seen the first steamboat, Captain Leideshorff, enter the bay from Sitka. He traveled the American River when it was called Rio de los Americanos. He could have bought *vara* * lots in '47 for fifty dollars; and smaller ones in '53, much farther out in the bay, brought sixteen thousand dollars.

He remembered the deserted appearance of the city in May, '48, when all the active-bodied had hurried to the valley of the Sacramento. There was the *Apollo*, anchored in the cove some distance from the beach; and he had seen the city suddenly expand and surround it. He had waded waist deep, when the tide was in, between California Street and Rincon Point; and had returned after a short absence to find the hills shoveled into the cove and a business center sprung up where he had fought the tide.

So rapidly had the changes come that he had the sense of living many years on the coast. Now the era was finished, and he was glad to go. If melancholy crept in it was in the nature of regret that the country was being so thickly settled.

"I'd be crowded out in another season even if I didn't have to go now," he mused. "One good thing 'bout the Rockies. Never git crowded."

Then his reverie was broken by a thread of smoke far below. At first he believed it was a camp-fire. Then another thread, close to the first, showed above the forest crown; and a third. The three cabins in Grass Hollow were being destroyed.

"They feel that bitter ag'in' me they'll burn innercent log huts," he muttered.

The three smokes told him the posses would be leaving the hollow, and he hastened back to the fire just as Maria was about to call to him.

The breakfast was hurriedly eaten as the feeling of being hunted was now strong in the mind of each, the mountain man excepted. The mule was packed, and as the little procession moved higher up the ridge before swinging south Old Misery walked beside Weymouth Mass and directed him to keep well east of Moquelumne Hill, Columbia and Sonora, so as to retire over the ridge into the Mono Lake country if threatened by a posse.

"I know the country. They can't catch us," assured Weymouth Mass.

"If *Señor Comandante* will tell Señor Weymouth to leave me and Beel Williams in the San Joaquin Valley, I can find my way to Corral Hollow Cañon and look out for myself," spoke up the girl.

"And be caught offhand," replied the mountain man. "That's one of the places the posses is aiming for. Weymouth, you deliver her in Mexico. Then if she comes back I'll be mighty sorry for her, but I'll have done my part. Can't you understand, Maria, that that —— of a friend of yours has played his game out and ain't got any more chips left than young Double-Time here had when he carried a fight to your monte-table? Don't your medicine tell you he'll lose his head just as sure as Ching-a-ling lost his? He'll never live to see the next rains. Californy is tired of his ways."

She laughed incredulously. Joaquin Murieta was the champion of her people, taking bloody reprisals for the countless wrongs inflicted by gold-hunters on Mexican inhabitants of what had been so recently a part of Mexico. He could not be killed. Yet Captain Love, veteran of the Mexican War, already had been authorized by the Legislature to raise a company of twenty-five rangers and eliminate the scourge. Even as she was deriding Old Misery's prophecy the hooded shape was standing close to the mountain bandit and was about to stretch forth a bony arm and touch his

*Spanish; a yard in California; equivalent to thirty-two inches.

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shoulder and motion for him to come away from all earthly affairs.

The travel through the eastern opening of the basin and up the ridge was rough, as there was no semblance of even an aboriginal path, and the fugitives' progress was slow. At mid-day they halted in a little valley, thick with firs and pines, and ate cooked meat.

"We'll split the trail here," gruffly announced Old Misery. "If you're ever in the Rockies, Weymouth, look me up. Ben will go back to sea after the women folks in the towns have got all his gold. Don't forgit the ledge where Bill Williams slept. I've cracked out two hundred dollars a day with a hammer from that rotten rock. Could 'a' taken out a thousand if I'd wanted to. Maria, you be a good girl. Don't chase 'round with robbers."

"*Señor Comandante*, I told Señor Gilbert's name in Grass Valley."

"I know it. You knew I knowed it. But keep out of monte places. Don't fight against the law. My new medicine tells me you can be happy if you want to be."

The girl seized his hand and embarrassed him by losing self-control and weeping.

"Come, come," he mumbled. "Never'll do, you young streak of scarlet. When I'm down Mexico-way I'll drop in and say howdy."

She released his hand and remained silent. Old Misery said good-by to Sailor Ben and then patted Bill Williams' head, but said nothing. Turning back, he fished a long plug of tobacco from his shirt and gave it to Weymouth, saying:

"Three good-sized chaws a day. When Maria gits home she'll remember Bill's a mountain man and hankers for it. Come along, younker. We're killing too much time."

Gilbert shook hands with the two men and then gave his hand to the girl.

"Good-by, Señor Gilbert. Luck is in your face. Is it not? You will be ver' happy some day. I am ver' sorry I told your name. But if I was angry again I might tell it. The *señorita* back in the East would understan'."

"Good-by, Maria. I'll always remember you kindly. You're to blame for nothing. I was just a fool; what Misery calls '*heyoka*.'"

"Come, come," hoarsely prompted the mountain man. "I've given the pipe and we've sung the travel-song. We're Big Shields and pitch our lodges forth in the Kiowy camping-circle. We have the care of *gadombitsonhi* and will count many coups. Mustn't lose no more time, younker."

And with this concluding farewell he struck up the ridge and never once glanced back. Not until within a few miles of the Truckee River road did he halt and explain their whereabouts to his gloomy companion.

"You won't know it's a road when you see it," he ran on. "So we won't take it yet a while. They may have men watching it for the hoss-thieves, and I'd hate to have you scooped up by mistake. We'll camp here and take a look at things in the morning. Once down t'other side I'll have to buy or steal some hosses from fellers that stole 'em over this side the ridge. Hope they won't forgit Bill's terbacker. I'd ruther turned him into the woods, but he'd make for the first man he saw, being that lonesome like, and the man would shoot him, being that blind he couldn't tell a reg'lar mountain man of a b'ar from a common grizzly. Well, well. Living seems to be made up of quitting doing things and beginning new things.

"You just stick along with me, younker. If you hanker for gold I know places where you can find it easy. Lots of it. There's the Snake River country. There's the Bitter Root country. Lawd! I've scuffed my feet over dozens of rich placer-mines, but I never was fool 'nough to take more'n what I needed for whisky, powder 'n' lead and terbacker."

Gilbert had no heart for talk. Mountains of gold could not compensate him for being a nameless wanderer. He had jumped off the earth. He could only say:

"You've been very kind to me. I've been a nuisance to you. Everything I ever planned to do is ended. You're the only one I care to travel with. I'll try to learn mountain ways so as not to be too much of a bother."

ON THE crest of the Sierra Gilbert had been permitted to stand at sunrise and gaze on two worlds. For a little time he forgot his pigmy affairs in wondering at the immensity of the panorama. From the north paraded the bewildering procession of peaks. In the west

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beyond the timbered foot-hills were the shadowy plains of the Sacramento. Ahead of them, already gilded by the promise of a new day, stretched forest and lakes and barren wastes. Old Misery eagerly pointed toward the Humboldt Mountains and insisted that his companion could see a faint blue line, but Gilbert only saw the dazzling light of the rising sun.

They took their time in following down the eastern slopes. They camped in wood-enclosed valleys. The mountain man shot deer, and they spent a day smoking and drying the meat; this to save their staple supplies. Gilbert became accustomed to the shadowy forms of wolves furtively accompanying them and learned to give them no heed. One day Old Misery shot a cougar from a tree. Gilbert, supposing he had fired at a bird, was much startled when the tawny body crashed to the ground.

Old Misery's spirits were those of a boy as they reached the lower valleys. Gilbert, now convinced he could not rearrange his fate, felt a leaden weight in his heart, but was spared the hysteria of uncertainty. California and committees were infinitely removed. Fear could no longer dog him. He endeavored to be a good traveling companion.

The second day after leaving the Truckee the mountain man announced:

"High time to hunt a Mormon station and buy a mule and some supplies. Two hosses, if we can git 'em. Two seasons ago there was a log trading-station five miles from here. May not be kept up, or the trader may be gone as it's too early for the immigrant trade to come in. You're gitting to be a good shot—at game. Bimeby you can try your hand on a moving target—Injuns.

"If you're chased by Injuns never try to hide up in bushes or woods. They'll sneak in and have your ha'r afore you know it. Break for open country and wait for 'em to come up. Sp'ils the best man's nerve to run away. Halt, throw your hoss and tie him, or shoot him. Lacking a hoss, throw up a little ridge of dirt with your knife. Even five or six inches makes you feel better.

"Never git excited when you see 'em come piling down. Never hurry. Make your first shot count. They'll try to scare —— out of you by howling and yowling. Just howl back at 'em. You'll find a big band of 'em will ride round you for hours, a-whooping, but not caring to rush in so long as your gun's loaded. They don't like to tackle mountain men. They've l'arned they have to pay too high a price, and they know they won't git much truck.

"What they hanker for most is fat wagon-trains, filled with greenhorns and store-goods. Always remember the Injun thinks different than white men. Let a dozen white men go into a bloody fight and they will all know some of their number will be rubbed out, but each man thinks he's the one that's coming through alive. Injun thinks just t'other way. Each one thinks his name's on every bullet. Aim your rifle at a line of fifty Injuns and every buck will go over the side of his pony, thinking he's your meat if he don't duck. Still, there's lots of Injuns I'd tie to quicker'n I would to most white men."

"I'm afraid they'd find me easy game," sighed Gilbert.

"Not after you've had one or two smart fusses with 'em. Now the Utes ain't any good on the plains, but in their mountains they're all ——. Mebbe we'll have a fracas with 'em going east and you can have a chance to git your hand in. But it would be better to break you in on open ground. Still, we can't have everything as we want it."

Gilbert said nothing. He was filled with gruesome forebodings. Old Misery took out the buckskin bag and stared thoughtfully at the manganese discolorations. The resemblance to the pine-clad ridge north of Grass Hollow was very strong. For some minutes he stared and stroked his beard thoughtfully.

"What do you see?" asked Gilbert, trying to simulate interest.

To him one piece of rock was like any other piece of rock.

"*Tunkan*, the Stone God, is trying to tell me something. Reckon I've got it. Yep. That must be it, or there wouldn't be any need for the medicine to speak. It says we prob'ly will be in for a fuss but will come out of it all right. That's good 'nough for me any time. Wouldn't Tom Tobin like to be here! —— little runt! Said I bit him!"

Their course next led through broken country that was less heavily timbered than the California slopes. There was the suggestion of sterility farther east. Gilbert could not discover any trace of path or trail,

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but Old Misery proceeded with the confidence of one walking a New England highway. He came to a halt in a shallow valley that was hemmed about with ragged evergreens. Near by was a low building of logs which Gilbert learned was the trading-house.

"Empty. No one to home," mused the mountain man. "We'll camp here tonight and start hunting for a Mormon station tomorrer."

Scattered around the log house was abundant testimony of preceding seasons' activities in the shape of cart-bodies, wheels, axletrees, broken harness, picks and shovels. This débris extended in a melancholy winrow to the foot of the first slope. Gilbert could only liken it to a sea-coast strewn with wreckage after a northeast gale, the wagon-trains being the ships and this first slope the reef, or rocky shore, on which they had foundered. But what surprized him were several undamaged wagons.

As if guessing his thoughts Old Misery explained:

"We'd see the same thing if we'd crossed from the head of the Tuolumne to the head of the Walker. Sonora traders have a station there. Immigrants find their wagons are too heavy when they come this far, or their stock is played out. They shift to lighter wagons, or use pack-animals. They strike into the plains with a big outfit and begin to leave things behind afore they make Great Salt Lake.

"From Salt Lake on they keep throwing stuff away. I've seen stations chuck full of grub and goods that's been picked up where the greenhorns had to toss 'em aside. Sometimes they have to dump out small hills of flour and then pay a mighty big price for it when they hit these foot-hills. What they have to sell ain't worth nothing, but when they want to buy from a station it's worth its weight in dust.

"A train will pull in here with only half the stock needed to fetch it over the ridge; or with their hosses 'n' cattle played out. Trader buys at his own price, sells at his own price. And so it goes; white folks robbing white folks in trade. A Injun won't do that to t'other Injun. If he's at war he'll kill and sculp; but he won't charge him dollar a pound for poor flour just 'cause t'other Injun's got the dollar and is starving.

"If there's any stores left in that place I'll take what we want and leave 'nough nuggets to pay. Then we'll hunt for a Mormon station, foller the Carson to the Sink and hit the Humboldt road and pass north of Great Salt Lake.

"We can save couple hundred miles—if we was in a hurry to git to anywhere in 'ticular—by taking the Hastings Cut-Off. Somehow I always think of the Donner party when I travel that road. They come out that way and got lost, or held up, or something, and reached the Sierra too late. Snow held 'em back. Starved. The camp where I shot the panther (Reno) was where they waited four days for two of their men to fetch grub from over the ridge, from Sutter's *rancho*. Wagons scattered over several miles round Truckee Lake and trapped in five feet of snow. Some folks call it Donner Lake since then. I went with the third relief party; —— of a time gitting to what was left alive of 'em.

"John Stark, a giant of a man, was with us. He carried two of the starved immigrants on his back at a time. His father was in Kentucky when old Boone was raising Cain with the Injuns. Tamsen Donner was one of the pluckiest women I ever see. She sent her children out, but wouldn't leave her dying husband.

"After he cashed in she tried it afoot and made seven miles afore pegging out. And only forty mile was 'tween that outfit and warmth and grub! Marysville was named after Mary Murphy, one of 'em that fetched through over the ridge. She married Charles Covillaud. First called New Mecklenburg, trading-post of two 'dobe houses. Then called Yubaville; then the name it now has."

THIS recital did not tend to elevate Gilbert's spirits. He was filling in terrible details as his companion talked. He was glad he had not known he was camping where the Donners had camped. He wondered what tragedies the shallow valley had to relate.

It was very quiet. He would have welcomed the howl of a wolf as in silence they advanced to the trading-house. The place was deserted, and there was a lock on the door. The last did not impress Gilbert as being unusual. Men locked their stores in the East.

Old Misery walked around the building and even strolled to the edge of the growth

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behind it. He found where a number of horses had grazed.

"Hosses been here not long ago," he mused.

Gilbert attached no significance to this statement. The mountain man fumbled his beard and swept his gaze slowly over the surrounding circle of evergreens and then back to the empty house, and surprized his friend by deciding—

"We'll strike out for the Carson."

"But not tonight," said Gilbert; "it's too near sunset. We can camp here. Perhaps the storekeeper will return. We must get some powder even if we can't get a mule."

Old Misery produced the buckskin bag and peered inside at the medicine-rock and studied it thoughtfully.

"I'm feeling *wakan witshasha*," he muttered. "I'd never budge a inch if I was alone. Trouble is, younker, I can't figger if my medicine covers both of us, or just me. That's the —— of it. If you was Tobin, and even if you wasn't covered, I'd say stick and have some fun."

This was unintelligible to Gilbert. He knew only his companion was given to superstitious vagaries. He knew that his legs were tired and that here was the companionship at least of a white man's house; and the sun would soon be slipping down the western slopes of the Sierra.

"No sense in walking in the dark," he urged. "I'll build a fire in front of the cabin. Maybe you can bag some small game. If you can't we have plenty of provisions."

"A fuss with me coming through it all right," mumbled the mountain man, scowling at the log house. "Must mean both of us. Wouldn't be 'all right' for me if it didn't. Still a red medicine can be slippery's ——; like a Dakota peace-pipe. It'll do just as it says, but sometimes you'll be fooled in reading it. Take a pipe that's rigged out like a peace-pipe and you can swear the Injuns will stick by it if it's all reg'lar. And they will.

"But if a figger of a snake is scratched along the stem and under the feathers it ain't a peace-pipe and don't 'mount to a ——. Now I'd give a heap to know if any snake is hid under what this *Tunkan* rock seems to be promising. Well, we'll go back to the house and peek through the winders. White folks have been here this season. It's too early to fetch trade-goods here. And if they're inside and any one wants to steal 'em a lock won't stop the thief. Wagon-trains won't be pulling in for a long time."

Now that they were at the front of the house Gilbert experienced a revulsion of feeling and wished they were on their way to the Carson. Without any discernible reason he felt uneasy. There had been nothing definite in his companion's words to occasion alarm, and yet he felt as if something evil was about to happen. He set it down to the lengthening shadows, the quiet of the fir-fringed hollow and the fact the log house was deserted. One small window in the end of the building and one beside the door were fitted with glass. The others were covered by stout shutters. He remarked on it, and Old Misery said the glass had been obtained from some wagon-train that had packed the useless stuff across the plains from the Missouri.

These two windows permitted the dying light partly to reveal the interior of the one long room. The mountain man pressed his face close to the glass and after gazing inside was puzzled to understand why the door should be locked. There was neither shelving nor merchandise. The back wall of the room was filled with bunks. Directly opposite his window were heaped saddles and bales of blankets. Several rifles and revolvers hung on the wall. In one corner were a dozen jugs and several bags.

"I believe the storekeeper is coming," spoke up Gilbert.

Old Misery faced about and picked up his rifle. A horseman was galloping from the east side of the valley. As he came on he held up an open hand.

"Howdy," saluted the mountain man. "You run this outfit?"

The man was grinning broadly, his big teeth clinched together; and without opening his mouth he replied:

"My name's Jason. I'm the trader here. Where you from? What do you want?"

Gilbert was fascinated in watching the writhing lips as the words came through the fence of teeth.

"We're from over the ridge. We want to trade for grub, pack-mule and two horses. We've got the dust to pay with. We're aiming to make the Humboldt road."

"Can't furnish a mule or hosses—you folks want there's plenty of whisky, beans, flour and smoked meat inside.

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I picket my hoss and I'll open up and rustle supper."

He rode to the corner of the house; then reined in and asked—

"Have you got dust or coins?"

The question seemed to be irrelevant but Old Misery told him:

"I said dust. I meant nuggets. Don't worry 'bout your pay. If we'd wanted to steal we could have busted in."

"I'd grub-stake you if you was busted," Jason warmly assured him. "Have to make several trades before I can git my profit in hard money or dust. Swap grub for that stuff I have to tote over the ridge and sell before I can make a profit. Sometimes I lose by it. It's mighty heartening to know it's a cash dicker. If you'd come here without a doller you'd be welcome; but when you come with dust or nuggets it makes me feel mighty good. With no trains coming in for——"

"I've got the dust, or nuggets. What'n—— you yawping 'bout so long?" querulously interrupted Old Misery.

"Stick up your hands!" commanded a voice behind them.

Gilbert and Misery turned and beheld a man on foot. He was aiming two heavy revolvers at them.

"And keep them up, you man who packs dust over to this side of the ridge," added Jason, riding back with a gun in each hand.

"Out-Injuned by skunks!" gritted Old Misery.

Half a dozen horsemen now galloped from the growth and bore down on the cabin.

"That medicine told the truth so far."

"What does this mean?" whispered Gilbert. "Posse after me?"

"No. Mebbe worse'n that. But keep shet. Try to act the way you ain't feeling. Leave me to do the powwowing."

The horsemen came to a plunging halt and, with the exception of a little man perched on a big rawbone roan, leaped to the ground, crowded around the two prisoners and quickly stripped them of their weapons.

"Walked right into your trap, Jason, and never 'spected it!" cried one ruffian admiringly.

"They say they got some Californy dust with 'em," Jason informed the mounted man.

"Perhaps they bring news that's of more value than the gold," replied the horseman in a shrill voice; and he slipped to the ground.

Gilbert was surprized to find himself accepting the situation so calmly. Truth was he was relieved to know he was not in the hands of a posse. To be robbed would be most disagreeable, but as yet he had no fear of physical harm. A posse might string him up, but it would be sadly ironical if the lawless and the law-enforcers should be of the same mind. Also, he believed, such a coincidence was very improbable. He studied Jason thoughtfully and decided the man's permanent grin was a facial peculiarity and not the reflection of a cheerful mood.

Old Misery, speaking slowly, said:

"If 'nough of you brave fellers have come in, and if 'nough guns are p'inted at us so you ain't afraid we'll bust loose and bite, we'd like to drop our arms. I'm an old man and, I git tired easy."

"You've got all their weapons, Jason?" piped up the little man. "Good. Now we'll take them inside so they won't catch a sickness from the evening air."

Loud guffaws of amusement greeted the last. The leader glanced at the weapons and appropriated Gilbert's pocket-knife.

"They're clean as a hound's tooth," Jason assured the little man.

"You're hoss-thieves," abruptly spoke up Old Misery.

The men laughed boisterously at this belated discovery.

But Jason, his mouth stretched to the utmost, warned him—

"Your talk is bad."

He shot forth a hand and caught the mountain man by the beard. The assault was hardly initiated before Misery had kicked the fellow violently on the shin; and as the man grunted in pain and released his hold to bend involuntarily and caress his leg the buckskin-clad knee smashed him in the face.

"I came here to buy grub and a mule, thinking this was a store," cried the mountain man. "Finding you to be hoss-thieves, I'll take what I need without paying."

The little man's bead-like eyes twinkled, and he danced aside to give the groaning Jason plenty of room. Growling in rage, Jason whipped out a knife and leaped toward Old Misery. Gilbert thrust out a foot and tripped him on his face. The mountain man scooped up the knife and cast it

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thirty feet to stick in a small pine. The outlaws remained motionless for a moment, taken completely by surprize at the unlooked-for happenings. Now they began crowding forward, mouthing oaths and threats. The leader, cackling merrily, suddenly intervened.

Jason, who would have renewed his attack, received a cuff in the face, and the leader was commanding:

"Enough of this play for now. The old gray rat has made me laugh. I owe him a good supper for that. Plenty of time to pass on their case."

"We're running from the vigilantes. I'm one of Murieta's men," announced Old Misery. "I killed Ching-a-ling, Murieta's spy in Nevada City, after the breed told the committee where to find Ana Benites."

The leader, in strong contrast to his bewhiskered followers because of his thin, clean-shaven face, came close to the mountain man and stared for fully a minute into the frosty blue eyes. There was no jocosity in his thin, penetrating voice as he warned:

"Old man, you've made a strong talk. You're either going to get what you came for without price, or you're going to have your throat cut. Now inside, the two of you. You men see they don't get loose till I've learned certain things."

"We'll go inside, but don't you make any throat-cutting talk to me, you little runt. Joaquin Murieta has a long arm; one that can reach a knife clear over the Sierra," loudly cried Old Misery.

"Softly, softly," advised the small man.

"Loudly, loudly, when I take the notion. You're buying stolen hosses from our men. Murieta can use you fine. But don't go to talking knives to your betters. It ain't for the likes of you to close a trail to me and my young friend."

"Softly, softly," repeated the leader in a low voice, but his men read the surging rage from the whip-cord veins standing out from eye to ear, and watched in eager silence.

"What's your name? S'pose you're called something," barked the mountain man.

"I'm called 'Snake' Martin," gently replied the leader, and his long, thin nose seemed to lengthen as his thin lips curved up. "We'll treat you like kings till we can look into your history. This talk about Ching-a-ling interests me. And you are sure you killed him?"

"By this time they've found his head tied up in one of his Chinese shawls. He gave the girl away to the committee. He killed her old blind grandpap, old Miguel, who went to see him. He was guarded by citizens and promised his liberty for giving the Benites girl away. I killed him in the little room back of his store right after he stabbed old Miguel."

Gilbert lowered his gaze to conceal his amazement at such prodigious falsehoods. Martin's thin face lost its evil merriment.

"I should be hearing about it very soon," he muttered.

"Most likely. And just as soon as your men fetch in the hosses they got from Adams' *rancho* you oughter give 'em a strong combing. Killed two herders they didn't need to kill and got Nevada City to stewing."

Martin's face grew somber. But his voice was low and soft as he murmured:

"They'll be crossing between the heads of the American and the Carson. If they've been making any unnecessary killings it's bad—for them. Killings are all right so long as Murieta is blamed. That was part of our bargain."

Wheeling to face Gilbert, he demanded:

"And this young man? Just why is he entitled to our hospitality? Does he ride with Brother Murieta?"

"He's the one who helped him 'scape from the El Dorado at the bay."

Martin nodded thoughtfully and stared curiously at the Vermonter. The members of the band exchanged surprized glances.

Martin admitted:

"We're heard about that. Talk had it he was an Englishman. But the air grows chill. We'll finish our talk inside."

The door was opened, and the prisoners were the first to enter. The shutters were removed, and two men kindled a fire and proceeded to cook supper. Martin sat down with his prisoners in a corner, his men keeping to the other end of the room. He proceeded to interrogate them closely. Gilbert had the easier part as he had to tell only about the El Dorado affair. Shrewd enough of wit once he had his cue, his recital left Martin to believe he went to the gambling-place with the Benites girl as part of a prearranged plan to rob the tables. His unhesitating explanations confirmed the reports that Martin already had received.

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When it came Old Misery's turn to be questioned he flatly refused to give his name. He said:

"A name don't count. I could give one or a thousand, and you'd know nothing more'n you do now. 'Nough to know I went to Ching-a-ling's place in Nevada City the night the crowds gathered in the street and sent men to block the passes in the ridge. Me 'n' my young partner was chased far up the ridge and got clear by follering the Truckee River down part way, and then busting to one side and taking the travel as we found it. We come in too much of a hustle to outfit with grub or a mule. So we aimed for here."

"Good. Excellent," murmured Martin. "It has the ring of truth. It may be true. I'll find out soon. We're hoss-thieves. We steal from *ranchos*, and we handle the stock Brother Joaquin's men steal. We sell the stock to immigrants in the Fall and plan to steal it back before they can drive it over the ridge. Lacking the immigrant trade, we sell to the Mormon stations in the Carson Valley, or make a drive even to Salt Lake City, where we have men who sell to the trains. Of course we plan to steal it back when the trains get this far.

"We make other profits from wagon-trains. I'm free, you see, to tell you much. But there's one thing you must remember; I'm boss here. Brother Joaquin is a big man, but I shall be in the saddle long after he's made his last ride. He mixes vengeance with business. Now I'm all business. To be boss I have to have discipline. And even Joaquin himself can't come here and talk only about so loud."

His soft voice and glittering gaze were very venomous as he gave the warning.

Gilbert wished his companion would restrain himself, but Old Misery laughed in derision and cried:

"The —— he can't! Why, alongside of him you're a fly alongside an eagle."

"I'm a patient man because I am a strong man," Martin quietly told him. "But some of my boys are quick-tempered and headstrong. They won't like loud talk."

"And I'm Old Man Trouble!" bawled the mountain man. "I won't hold my tongue till I'm dead. I'm a trouble-hunter. Still I'm a fair-minded man. I stick by what I say. I'm tired of hearing war-talk. S'pose you pick out the strongest cuss you've got, that don't like my ways, and turn us loose for a little fracas. Knives, hatchets, guns, or bows 'n' arrers."

And his gaze wandered to where a dozen bows and as many filled quivers were piled—a most unusual complement for such a den.

Martin's gaze darted to the grinning visage of Jason, then passed on to a hulking figure leaning against the wall by the open door. And he murmured:

"If I was sure Brother Joaquin would understand! If I knew you really wanted to try your skill! But, no, no. You'd be killed, or badly injured. You'd say you didn' have a fair chance——"

"A lie, if I did have a fair chance!" angrily broke in Old Misery.

A bit of color showed in the thin cheeks, yet Martin was outwardly composed as he reminded the other.

"You couldn't speak after you were killed. Brother Joaquin would only know you had been knifed to death. On the other hand it's bad for discipline to have you talk so loud. If you're allowed to do it, others might take the notion to try it, and that would be very bad—for them. A man can't be a leader unless he has followers. Now there's Everick—" and he nodded toward the big man by the door— "no, that would never do. He's too much in earnest in his work. Too whole-hearted. Why, I've seen him tear a man to pieces with his bare hands!"

The mountain man gave a snort of disdain and brought the man Everick to his feet, lowering murderously, as he derided:

"Prob'ly found some poor root 'n' grass Injun asleep. If he's such a keen one, then let him 'n' me have a friendly tussle without weepins. I'm free to say that with knife, gun, or hatchet he wouldn't stand no more chance then a Chinaman on a rich claim beyond the ridge."

The long, thin nose came down, and the thin lips curved up. And Martin smiled grimly and stared at the mountain man with new respect. Gilbert was greatly frightened. He could not understand why his old friend should go out of his way to engage in a brawl, and above all things to select the largest and most brutal-appearing man in the whole reckless band. It fairly nauseated him to think of the outcome of the unequal battle. Everick glared at Old Misery, and then turned pleading eyes on his chief. The others waited with wolfish interest to hear the little man's decision.

Speaking slowly, Martin said:

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"If you could be tamed, old man, you'd make a good man for me. As it is you're too audacious, too ambitious. I'm wondering how much of it you mean, and how much is bluff. Everick, listen to me, and remember; there must be no killing. I may be unwise to permit it, but our guest is too insistent."

Then to Old Misery:

"You're not bound to go into it. Suppose we forget all about it?"

"That's one way of saving your man's hide," agreed Old Misery.

Everick sounded a bull-like roar and shuffled his feet nervously and waited for the word. The mountain man had convinced himself Martin was the most dangerous one of the band and well worthy of leadership.

"Remove your weapons, Everick, and step outside. When I say stop, you stop. You know me, Everick. Stop when I say the word."

"I'll heed the word, chief, but this waiting chokes me," gasped Everick; and he plunged through the doorway and stripped off his blue shirt and stamped his feet impatiently.

"Even now it's not too late. It will soon be dark," said Martin.

"Don't—do—it," begged Gilbert in an undertone, and fighting to get each word off his tongue.

"The light will last as long as I need it," assured the mountain man.

He jumped to his feet and stripped to the waist and revealed the back and shoulders of a man half his years. But what impressed Martin was the many scars on chest and back. There was one especially hideous wound on the upper part of the back near the spine. Martin touched it gently with a finger and said—

"That was very severe, my friend."

"Bah! That was a bit of fun. I carried eight skulls in the Sun Dance."

Then to Gilbert he whispered:

"Hold my shirt and the rock-medicine. Open the bag and keep it p'inted toward us. Don't fret. Got to make 'em think we're *wakan witshasha*. Got to git clear 'fore others come in from over the ridge."

Then, throwing back his head, he began singing "Like a Wolf I Roam," a war-song of the Teton Sioux—

"*Sunka isnala miyelo ca, maka oka winhya omawani.*"*

*"Lone Wolf am I, in different places I roam."

Snake Martin watched him curiously, admiration and a glint of doubt beginning to show in his sharp eyes. He had believed the old man was bluffing; but that network of scars testified to occasions when he must have been terribly in earnest. He had resented the old man's boastful words; now he was wondering if aught short of death could still the audacious tongue.

If not for the lurking fear that Misery was telling the truth when claiming membership in Murieta's band he would have ordered his throat cut on the spot. He was too wayward and assertive to make a valuable member of Snake Martin's band. And yet Martin was convinced that only egotistical insanity could prompt a man of the prisoner's many years to seek a rough-and-tumble fight with Everick.

Everick was roaring impatiently outside the door. Old Misery approached the door slowly with the thudding, stamping steps of a Dakota war-dancer; and as he danced he chanted the meaningless syllables, "*he a hi ye—he yo.*" He was grotesquely dancing, his head thrown back and rolling from side to side as he reached the door. As his head swung around he saw Gilbert, wild of gaze, following him with the buckskin bag concealed under the hunting-shirt.

Everick stretched out his brawny arms and cursed him foully.

"Be you all ready?" cried Old Misery.

"—— you! Come out here in reach of my hooks," roared Everick.

Like an arrow released from a strong bow the mountain man leaped upon him and knocked him flat on his back. Before the astounded thief could get to his feet Misery was clear of his groping hands and was leaping high and smacking his heels together three times. While Everick was on his knees Old Misery darted forward and caught the big fellow between the eyes with his heel and bent the huge bulk far back.

"Curse you, Everick! Get up and give him a fight," whined Martin from the doorway.

" 'A wolf am I, but I've eaten nothing,' " howled the mountain man, dancing with bewildering quickness about his now erect antagonist. "*He a hi ye.* Bring me a fight, you big cow! I feel cold. Make me sweat into warmth. *He yo!*"

And Gilbert groaned in terror while the others grunted in pleased anticipation as the mountain man abandoned his dancing

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tactics and deliberately rushed into the arms of his infuriated opponent.

"By ——! Now he's cooked his kettle!" shrilly rejoiced Martin as he saw the big arms wind around the mountain man.

But Old Misery had both elbows against Everick's hairy chest, and the back-hold was useless so long as he maintained that position. Everick towered a head above Misery, yet he strained and grunted to no purpose. For several minutes they stood without moving from their tracks; then Old Misery butted, his head catching Everick under the chin. And the click of the violently-closed jaws was audible to the breathless spectators.

As the shaggy head went back the arms were relaxed and the mountain man was six feet away, grinning and ruffling his yellowish-white beard and reminding Gilbert:

"The medicine, younker. *Tunkan* is with me. *He a hi ye.* Set up a man, you little runt, so I can keep warm."

"——! Get that old rat!" screamed Martin to Everick, who stood shaking his head and waiting for the mountain man to attack.

With a booming roar Everick rushed forward, his big hands reached ahead, his fingers wide-spread. Gilbert winked and blinked as Old Misery ducked under an arm and Everick yelled in pain. The Vermonter could not see that his friend had touched the big fellow, and yet the latter was shaking a hand and even pausing to caress it.

"——! He 'most tore his little finger off!" yelled an outlaw.

" 'A lone wolf am I, in different places I roam,' " sang Old Misery, capering around his antagonist. "*He yo!* I'll bust every finger you got, you broken-down beef-critter."

"Get that man!" whined Martin. "—— you! Get him, or never show your head in this outfit again!"

All but foaming at the mouth, the infuriated giant leaped at Misery as the latter danced derisively to close quarters.

"He's got him! He's got him!" gleefully howled the savage spectators as the two forms became one, a whirling, confused mass that seemed to be all arms and legs.

"Good work, Everick!" shrilly approved Martin.

With the medicine-bag open, the mouth pointing toward the blurred antagonists, Gilbert watched and held his breath. Suddenly the mass cleaved apart.

"*He a hi ye,*" panted the mountain man as he stood and looked down at the squirming figure.

"Good ——!" gasped Martin. "You old ——! What have you done to him?" And he advanced to kneel beside the prostrate man.

"Nothing much," replied the mountain man. "Just started to take him apart, like he did for t'other man you was telling 'bout. I'm *wakan witshasha.* I let up when he wouldn't fight no more. When a man won't fight I just gentle him and hunt for stronger meat."

Everick groaned and writhed. Martin examined him with practised hand.

"Little finger, lower left leg and right forearm broken," he diagnosed in a shrill singsong.

Rising and dusting his hands, he directed:

"You men take him inside. José, you fix him up. When he can straddle a horse he rides away."

"In this sort of fussing I can make every man of your outfit ride away alone," Old Misery informed him.

"—— you! Stop that kind of talk!" hissed Martin. "Or I'll forget your claim of being one of Murieta's men and take you on myself."

"You're the toughest one in this outfit, even if you be undersized and pindling," readily admitted Old Misery. "You're the only one that could make me watch out."

"Inside with the two of you." Then to his men: "If either of them tries to escape, shoot. If they're Murieta's men they're welcome to horses and supplies; but they can't stay once I get word they're all right. If they're lying I'll soon know it, and they'll stay here for all time."

Inside the cabin Old Misery put on his shirt and hunting-frock and took back his rock-medicine. To Gilbert he confided:

"Keeping it aimed at me done the trick. I could feel *Tunkan* strength flowing through me. If that critter hadn't quit I'd had him in more pieces then I can sep'rate Solid Comfort into. Well, younker, you'll have to agree that life looks brighter'n it did afore we found these folks. Lawd! How Tom Tobin would 'a' like to been here!"

"It's horrible! Terrible! I feel sick to the stomach," whispered Gilbert.

Old Misery frowned; then grew placid of visage and declared:

"I'll make a mountain man of you yet.

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You don't start good, but you'll come to it. After you've had a fuss or two you'll like it prime. Now let's call for some grub."

CHAPTER XI

SEEDS OF MUTINY

SNAKE MARTIN lounged on the ground apart from his men, his beady eyes glowing evilly as he stared at Everick, who was stretched on blankets some dozen paces from the cabin door. The leader's gaze became speculative as it shifted to Old Misery and Gilbert, seated under a ragged pine. The young man was reading from a book, and Old Misery appeared to be deeply interested, for he had allowed his pipe to go out.

"Good men for me if the old one wasn't brash," mused Martin. "I could cut his comb, but I'd have to cut his throat first."

He rose to his feet and strolled over to the pine and remarked—

"I'll share the shade with you."

Old Misery glanced up impatiently and replied:

"Then squat and keep shet. This is a Winter count of the four worst-acting —— you ever heard tell 'bout. Making love and fighting their bigness all over a place called France. Git along, younker. Break the trail to the next scrimmage."

Although much agitated by the presence of the terrible little man Gilbert managed to control his voice and resume the adventures of *D'Artagnan* and his three friends. Martin listened appreciatively and soon got the atmosphere of the story. He sat with head cocked to one side, his fingers idly snapping dead twigs and methodically arranging them in little piles between his legs. At first Gilbert was ill at ease; then the narrative gripped him and he forgot his peril in following the bold deeds of the irrepressible quartet.

As he finished a chapter and paused to rest his throat Old Misery cried:

"If they wasn't he-hellions then I never swapped lead with a Blackfoot! And I'd 'lowed this was the only place left where they'd fetch you a good fight! If it wa'n't for the ocean I'd like to go over there and watch the fun. Four humdingers, and always hungry for a fuss!"

"What do you think of it, what little you've heard, Mr. Martin?" Gilbert politely inquired.

"I like it," readily answered Martin, his small eyes snapping. "Mighty clever the way the young fellow read the signs left by the horses. I wouldn't want him to be tracking me. I must tell the men to save all books after this."

Old Misery filled his pipe and informed Martin:

"The younker can't read all the time. Not 'nough book and not 'nough throat. We're feeling rather cramped. We want to be walking 'bout a bit."

Martin pulled Gilbert's pocket-knife from his pocket and shaved a dead branch to a needle point and stared thoughtfully at the mountain man. Finally he said:

"You're free to move around in this valley. You have no weapons, no food. You'd be fools to try and run away. If you act the fool you'll be caught and shot in your tracks. If you're not back here two hours before sundown my men start after you with orders to bury you where they find you."

"You blood-thirsty little cuss!" Old Misery cried admiringly. "You'd do just as you say. And that's the worst of it. But folks' idees about time don't always hitch. S'pose you fire two shots when it's time for us to be showing in the open? The younker here believes things happen in the East hours before they happen here, and yet happen just the same time. Only weak spot in him."

"Difference in time? I supposed every one understood that. Very well; when you hear two shots, close together, you show yourselves in the opening."

"How's the big ox gitting along?" inquired Misery as he rose to his feet and glanced at Everick.

"José did a good job setting the bones. When he's able to travel he leaves us."

"Too bad. Best fighting man you've got at that. Sort of hard on him," remarked the mountain man.

"I told him to get you, and he didn't obey orders," whined Martin; then, with a shrill laugh, added: "But he's keen to go. He's always been rough with the men. Too many of them holding grudges against him for him to stay on with us. They know his spirit's been broken, and there's half a dozen knives all sharpened for him. I shall have to scheme a little to give him a fair start."

"That's a fine spirit for a fighting crowd!"

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heartily endorsed Old Misery. "You've got a mighty good outfit. Man to man they'll stack up better'n Joaquin's. Take him away and Three-Fingered Jack, and the rest are so many rabbits. More I see of this outfit the more I know I'm going to like it. Nothing like a little roughness to sweeten life. Do they ever settle a argument with knives, left arms tied together? A good way, as there's never no doubt 'bout the winner. And some mighty funny things always happen when two men git to whirling round, each trying to get behind t'other."

"I've tried it twice. It works well," quietly replied Martin, replacing the knife and dusting his hands. "A small man has a better show than a big man in that style of fighting."

"You little throat-cutting cuss! ——— me, if I don't like you!" exploded Old Misery. "No need of firing signal-shots. I wouldn't leave this outfit for the best wagon-train ever robbed and burned!"

Martin's brows went up, likewise his thin lips; and the long nose seemed to creep down. But all he said was:

"Brother Joaquin might not like it if I stole two of his best men. Don't forget the signal-shots. They mark the difference between living and dying. If you're on time we'll hear some more of the young man's reading. After the rest of my men arrive with the horses I'll have but little time for pleasure."

As he walked toward the cabin Old Misery stared after him with round, wide eyes. Then he spat and hissed:

"The pizen snake! He's named right! We've got two big jobs ahead of us. To make him feel like letting us live, but to be keen for us to sing a travel-song and git out. Come along, younker."

"Can we run for it?" eagerly whispered Gilbert.

"Without guns or grub? No, no. We can't go back over the ridge, and the road east is through a bad country. But remember this: Snake Martin is as bad a fiend as Joaquin Murieta. He'll kill just as quick, and he'll never give t'other feller any show at all. You saw them bows and arrers in the cabin? I got hold of one last night long enough to see it never was made by a Injun. They're 'nough to show me what sort of hellions we've stumbled on to. Murieta hates 'Mericans. He come to the gold-fields in Forty-nine, when he was only eighteen. Worked north from Los Angeles into the Stanislaus country and located a rich placer.

"Gold-hunters, always trying to boss greasers round, ordered him out, and he quit. Then it was said he stole a horse he happened to be riding. Joaquin said it was his half-brother's hoss. So they hung the half-brother and tied Joaquin to the same tree and laid on the whip. Then he begun robbing and murdering. Killed any one he come across except Mexicans. They're all his friends. But he sticks by his friends. He keeps his word, I believe. I saved his life, not knowing who he was, and he wrote his name on that monte-card to show I wasn't to be robbed or killed. But he's bad. He's got to be killed.

"Now Snake Martin never was whipped that I know of. He's 'Merican blood, and he kills 'Mericans. Them bows 'n' arrers tell me he rigs his men up like Injuns and raids wagon-trains. Leaves arrers in the dead. If any one gits away from the train he'll say Injuns did it. Then the Utes are blamed. So, in a way, he's worse'n Murieta."

"But what will become of us? We can't even pretend to join them," muttered Gilbert as they walked along the edge of the growth.

"A man can pretend almost anything up to a certain p'int," mumbled Old Misery, his gaze troubled as he glanced at his melancholy companion. "My rock-medicine has been all right so far. It covered both of us in my fight with the big ox. Didn't really need any medicine to best him— I take that back. I needed it powerful bad."

Then in a low whisper, as if fearing *Tunkan* might overhear and resent, he explained:

"No good to talk light 'bout any medicine. A medicine is mighty techy. More so if it's a strong one."

And thoroughly to appease the god of the rocks he loudly declared:

"I'll make a feast to *Tunkan*. I'll place rocks in trees in the first rock-medicine place I come to."

And he hummed a Sacred Stone song and turned deeper into the growth.

Once under cover he halted and motioned for Gilbert to crouch low and look back. Three men, carrying rifles, were leaving the cabin. Two were making for the growth on the prisoners' side of the valley. The

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other was entering the timber on the opposite side.

"They're following to murder us!" gasped Gilbert, the black wings sounding very close.

"They'd all be coming along this side if that was their notion. Martin sends 'em to dog our steps. Now if you was Tobin we'd lay for them two and take their guns and hustle round and bag the third man, and then hold up the cabin and clean out the whole gang. As it is you 'n' me might jump the two and do for 'em and take their guns and run for it! But that wouldn't give us hosses, or grub. Besides, Solid Comfort is back in the cabin, and it's a *wakan* gun and I won't leave it. We'll trail along a bit and let 'em pass us."

When near the end of the valley the mountain man halted in a group of stunted pines. Soon they heard steps and low voices, and Old Misery grinned and whispered—

"A wounded buff'ler could out-Injun 'em."

The two men came up, moving slowly and without any pretense at woodcraft. Nor were they interested in their business of spying on the prisoners. They took advantage of their isolation from the band to halt near the pines and exchange confidences. One of them was saying:

"Don't care so far as Everick's concerned. But if he's told to ride for it, then any one of us can be booted out."

"Well, he was licked. He'll be no good after this," growled the second man. "And he won't ride far if I can git the drop on him."

"That ain't it. The chief shows his disposition in booting him out. What about Everick's share that the chief's hid somewhere and says he's going to divide with the gang when we split up?"

"Everick don't git it. He don't git nothing," rejoiced the second man.

"We don't want him to get it. But do we get our share? That's the point. No one knows where it's hid except the chief. Bernie, the Frenchman, knew. He helped bury it. But Bernie's dead. I'm mighty sorry Bernie cashed in."

"The derned fool would keep filled up on whisky," grumbled the second man.

"True. But he was a man who always kept filled up on whisky. Queer it should kill him just as it did. Maybe he worked so hard in hiding the stuff to weaken his heart."

Suspicion at last had found lodgment in the second man's slow wits, and he glared at his companion wildly and exclaimed:

"Good ——, Bommer! You mean——"

"I don't mean a thing," hastily interrupted Bommer. "You just remember I haven't said a thing, Somes. I've talked more with you than with any of the others, but even now I don't know as I know you well enough to say things."

"Bommer, I can be trusted. I never shoot off my mouth," Somes hoarsely assured him. "We're alone. You talk. I'd die before I'd whisper a word."

Bommer stared at his companion searchingly for a few moments and then reminded him:

"Chief would kill me for what little I've said already, Somes. You're the only man I'd tell what little I've already said. But I did you a good turn once, and I don't believe you'd——"

"Not for all the gold that was ever stole," eagerly broke in Somes. "I ain't quick at thinking, but I ain't no snake. You talk. You do the thinking and tell me what to do. There's a share of that stuff that's coming to me, and by —— I'm going to have it, or die in my boots!"

"Not so loud," cautioned Bommer. "Ike will be coming round from the other side. No one in the gang knows where the stuff's hid now that Bernie's dead—from drinking whisky—and *arsenic*."

Somes scratched his head, then scowled malignantly and gritted—

"Snake Martin ain't got no charmed life!"

"Ah, Somes, you're mistaken. He has. No one in the gang will want him dead until it's known where the stuff is hid. Everick loses his share. The rest of us already have lost our shares unless we find the hiding-place."

"Ain't there 'nough of the boys to corner him and burn it out of him?" demanded Somes in a thick voice.

Bommer smiled wickedly and reminded him:

"If we did that, then we'd sit down, with guns handy, to divide in equal shares. Probably there would be some fighting. Every man dead would mean so much more for those left alive. But suppose you and I learn where it's hidden. How many shares would there be then?"

Somes gaped at him blankly for a moment, then began to grin as intelligence

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percolated to his slow brain. The grin became a silent laugh, a paroxysm of noiseless mirth, and he leaned against a tree. When he could speak he softly cried:

"You've got a head, Bommer! Comes of having a eddication. Two shares, of course, just you 'n' me!"

And he resumed his silent laughing.

"Stop it!" warned Bommer. "Keep your mouth shut and your eyes open. Don't try to talk to me before the others. Some time the chief will visit the hiding-place. It's near here. He and Bernie were gone only a few hours from the cabin. He probably kept away that long to make us think they had traveled some distance. But the pack-mule hadn't wet a hair. I was quick to see that much."

"Eddication again, by ——!" enthusiastically murmured Somes.

"This game is about up. Once Murieta goes under we'll stop running off stock. While he lives and takes the blame we can keep on; buying from him and stealing direct. Murieta can't last much longer. They're bound to get him. When we can't steal stock we must bust up. The other line is too dangerous. Wagon-trains will come through heavily guarded. Just keep your eyes open and tell me what you see. I'll do the thinking."

They resumed their trailing. Old Misery rose and held a finger to his lips and led the way back toward the east and deeper into the growth. They came to a little natural opening, of not more than two acres in extent, and threw themselves on the ground. Gilbert's gaze wandered to several mounds in the middle of the glade, and with a little shiver he exclaimed:

"Folks are buried there. Poor unfortunates. Wonder who they were!"

"Too many such out this way for a man to spend his time guessing who's in 'em," muttered the mountain man. "You heard what them two men said? Martin's a slipperier cuss then I thought. He's corralled all the gang's stealings, and no one wants him dead till they find out where the stuff's hid. The man Bommer prob'ly had the right of it in thinking they hid the stuff near the cabin, then killed a few hours."

"And the Frenchman is dead!"

"Most naturally. His bad luck in helping to hide the stuff. Pizened by Martin. I'll keep an eye on that skunk. This gang's going to bust up soon. We mustn't be hit by any of the pieces. We've got to get away, but not make it a running fight less we have to. They've got to think we're bad ones. We must make Martin hanker to be rid of us without killing us. No matter what I do, or say, you sit tight. It's a bad mess. Worse'n I thought at first. But I started to make a mountain man out of you, and I'll do it if I have to make —— hoot and hum. Now take out that book and make believe you're reading to me. Don't look round. We'll soon have comp'ny."

Gilbert pulled out his story-book and began reading in an undertone. Old Misery, lying on his back, his hands clasped behind his head, from the corner of his eye watched the figure of a man standing at the edge of the growth on his right.

"He ain't in hearing of us," he murmured. "And he ain't either of them two who was trailing us like a yoke of cattle. Just keep on reading and act a little s'prized if he comes up."

Several minutes passed; then a soft step sounded behind them, and the mountain man came to a sitting posture and turned and beheld Snake Martin. The outlaw leader dropped to the ground, sitting crossed-legged, and remarked—

"You didn't walk very far?"

"Nearly to the end of the valley. Then turned back. Felt sort of crowded down there. Wanted to be alone."

"Some of my men, eh? But I gave them orders not to bother you."

"They didn't. This opening oughter graze a few hosses."

Martin pulled out Gilbert's knife and began sharpening twigs, and remarked:

"Men don't like this place. Superstitious fools. Afraid of a few graves. So we pasture the stock in an opening south of the valley. We plan to keep only our riding-horses in the valley."

Old Misery stirred uneasily and confessed:

"I don't like graves. Don't mind a man drying in a tree, but to be put under ground! That's 'nough to make any ghost git up on his hind legs and hoot. I'm just like a Crow in that way; never want to be hid under ground. They some of your men?"

"Some of the Donner party," replied Martin in his high-pitched voice. "I've lost no men here. Those dropped out on a raid are left for others to bury. We haven't time. But we've been lucky. Lost only four men in two seasons. If I kept them

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on the other side of the ridge where they could get to a town they'd all be killed off in one season. This makes a good camp for us."

"A humdinger," agreed the mountain man. "No one to bother you except a prospector now 'n' then, I s'pose.' '

Martin smiled in his peculiar manner and shrilly assured Misery—

"They don't bother us."

"Good place. I like it," mumbled Misery. "Sorter grows on a man. Our time nearly up?"

Martin glanced at the sun and decided—

"It'll be an hour before the cook gives the signal."

With that he rose and carefully brushed his clothes and put up the knife.

Old Misery also stood and decided:

"Reckon we'd best walk back with you. Cook's idee of time and yours might not hitch. And them fellers in the woods might think we was ghosts and go to blazing at us if they saw us quitting this place."

"Perhaps you'd be safer if you rested on the other side of the valley," said Martin. "The men get nervous."

He led the way but did not, the mountain man observed, take a direct course. He traveled east through the growth and left it at a point a short distance back of the log house. As the three approached the house Bommer and Somes emerged from the south side of the valley, having all but traveled around it. A minute later and the third man came out of the growth on the north side.

Old Misery and Gilbert were greeted with sullen glances as they seated themselves near the open door.

Martin walked over to Everick and told him:

"You'll have to bunk out here. Your damnable groaning keeps the men awake."

Then he turned to the swarthy Mexican, who had been examining the splints on the leg and arm.

"Hurry him along, José, so he can sit in a saddle. We may be taking a ride soon and have to leave him alone."

"*Sí, Señor*. He is doing ver' well," humbly replied the Mexican.

"But, chief! Just a minute," loudly pleaded Everick. "Hoss 'n' gun ain't 'nough. I brought that much to the band. I've worked hard for you. But you don't say nothing about my share——"

Bommer nudged Somes in the ribs. Martin pushed the Mexican back and dropped on his knees beside the wounded man. Bending over him, he talked rapidly in a shrill, whining tone. None but Everick heard what he said, but all knew the menace of that wailing, whining voice. When he rose and brushed his knees and leisurely started for the house Everick did not endeavor to detain him. José glided to his patient and observed that the broad face was dotted with perspiration.

Martin halted before the group, flicked a swift glance over the stolid, bearded faces, and with a laugh informed them:

"Now that he knows he must go he can't go quick enough. He'd try to ride away tonight if I'd say the word."

Turning, he called out—

"Isn't that the case, Everick?"

"Yes, yes!" groaned the wounded man. "For God's sake, let me go now!"

"You men see how glad he is to leave us," resumed Martin, and the long, thin nose seemed to be creeping down over the upcurved lips. "But we must look out for Everick and keep him till he's able to ride. We must be fair with Everick. We mustn't be too harsh in judging him. It's true he failed when he should have won. But we had overestimated him. We must try to believe he did all he could. However, we have no room for him. He must go. Already he's out of the band. That means none of you have any truck with him, no more'n if he was a stranger. José will wait on him and tell me if any man breaks the rules."

Bommer drove his elbow into Somes' side. The others remained stolid of face.

Martin entered the house and called out—

"Time to take a drink."

The men filed through the doorway.

Old Misery whispered to Gilbert:

"Don't git the notion I'm on the rampage after I take a few snorts. No matter what I do, it's just my game. We've got to git out of here quick. Martin lied about the graves. None of the Donner party was down this far. None was buried down here. They weren't trapped till they got up on the Truckee. My medicine tells me I must do two things; make 'em think we're what we claim to be—Joaquin's men; and make 'em keen to have us clear out."

He came to his feet and sounded a ringing

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war-whoop and bustled through the doorway. The men holding filled dippers, or in the act of filling them, stared at him wrathfully. He grinned benignly and told Jason of the exposed teeth:

"Don't look sour at me, old hoss-fly. Boss called for the thirsty to gather, and I'm dryer'n a patch of alkali. Some one gimme a dipper."

It was Snake Martin who accommodated him. His small eyes were points of fire as he stared at the mountain man.

Old Misery poured a big drink and demanded:

"What we waiting for? Nothing wrong with the drink, is there?"

Bommer's hand twitched and slopped out some of the liquor.

Old Misery continued—

"Here's to a fat season, with a fat share to every man."

Some started to drink, including Bommer and Somes.

Jason remarked—

"It's the first I've heard tell you was one of us."

"I was just wishing you well. You'll all need good wishes afore the season's over. If the younker 'n' me ain't in the gang we will be soon."

Martin softly inquired—

"Why do you think that?"

"I don't 'think.' I *know*," stoutly replied Misery. "Lawdy! But you fellers need new blood. Same lot of you been so long together that you're splitting up in pairs. Every pair is feeling harsh toward the rest. You need new men to jumble you all together in one happy band again. But the 'new men' must be men you can count on to toe the mark. I've rid with Joaquin. I'm a he-grizzly b'ar.

"My partner saved Joaquin's life. He's a reg'lar panther prowling round to make a kill. We had to light out and leave Joaquin. He'd be glad to have us back. But we knew it was time for us to pull out. Trouble with you folks is you're tied up too close to him. It's bad medicine."

"Stop your ranting and tell what you mean by that last," shrilly demanded Martin.

"Meaning you'll bust to pieces when Joaquin's potted if you don't make new trails. You oughter quit waiting for him to steal hosses and turn 'em over to you. Oughter quit working for him and work for yourselves. Oughter have a good camp up on the ridge, north of the Truckee. Then you'd be fixed so's you could make quick raids down to the towns and back to camp. If a posse stumbled on your camp you could fall back to this side of the ridge to this place. Then go up the slope when the posse went back to town. There's too much waiting in the way you fellers play the game."

Snake Martin's voice sounded faint and thin as he assured Misery:

"My friend, there will not be much more waiting. Be patient."

"H'ray! Knew you was sensible. Bad for a gang to have too much time on its hands. Men git out of temper and sour. Lots of action and blooding needed to keep a parcel of men up to top-notch. That liquor's *wakan*. It makes my toes curl. Let's have 'nother snort and go outside and have some fun. Time passes like a mortal wounded buf'ler when we just squat and do nothing."

"Be patient," repeated Martin. "There'll not be much more waiting."

The thieves exchanged significant glances, and several smiled furtively as they believed they had caught their leader's hidden meaning. Their manner changed, and instead of lowering on the mountain man they now smiled wolfishly and grinned much; and they nodded ironically to him as they lifted their dippers, as if wishing him health and happiness.

Of all the group only Bommer agreed with the mountain man's opinion. Ever since returning with Somes from the woods he had been trying to understand how the two strangers had eluded him. As he sensed the chief's hostility to the newcomers he discovered his own feelings were almost sympathetic.

The second drink seemed to have a quick effect on the mountain man. He commenced a shuffling dance, and on reaching the pile of bows and arrows he picked up a bow and snatched an arrow from a quiver.

Instantly Martin had him covered with a revolver and was crying—

"Drop that!"

With a foolish grin Old Misery discarded the weapons and complained:

"Not an ounce of fun in the whole outfit. Think I was going to hold you up with a bow 'n' arrer?' '

"Never mind what I thought. No more drinking, boys."

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Then back to Old Misery—

"First thing you know you'll stir up more fun than you can take care of."

"Mebbe," cheerfully admitted Misery. "But it'll be because I don't have a square shake. Just ask Joaquin Murieta what he thinks of me. He'll tell you I can lick a tribe of panthers in a knife-scrimmage, steal more hosses then you ever grazed in these parts; and that I've tossed away more dust then you folks ever stole."

Again the veins over the leader's temples stood out like whipcords, and his men were quick to read the sign and give ground. Those nearest the door slipped outside.

Martin's voice was so faint as to be scarcely audible as he told Misery:

"—— you and your gall! You're digging your grave with your tongue. Think my boys, or I, will stand for such high talk much longer?"

"High talk?" scoffed the mountain man. "Why, I ain't said a word yet that I can't make good. Ask Murieta what he thinks of Old Man Trouble-Hunter. Ask any of his men how many thousands in dust I've tossed away to them that needed. Ask——"

His repeated reference to his generosity enraged Martin to the breaking-point; and with a hissing intake of breath he yanked a gun from his trousers and slowly brought it down, full-cocked. Gilbert, staring through the window, held his fist to his mouth to keep from screaming in terror.

Bommer hoarsely ventured:

"The old fool is drunk, chief."

With a swing of his head Martin whined:

"—— you, Bommer! Fingers in my dish? I don't like it. You boys know I don't like it."

And even Bommer's eyes fell before the flaming glance.

"I am *mato wapiya*—grizzly b'ar medicine," shouted Old Misery. "Reckon I'll give the b'ar dance."

And as Martin was resuming his threatening pose the mountain man dropped his hands before him and commenced an awkward, ludicrous dance, his head rolling from side to side, as tame bears in the coast towns were taught to do. Martin stood rigid, the revolver aimed, but the antics of the grotesque figure caused the onlookers to forget the impending tragedy, and furtive smiles grew into broad grins as the mountain man assumed the double rôle of trainer and animal, and gave orders and obeyed them.

With a terrible oath, but spoken in a peevish falsetto, Martin thrust his gun into his waistband and complained—

"I can't shoot the old fool when he's drunk; but I will when he's sober."

"Here comes a man riding hard!" yelled Gilbert at the window.

TO BE CONCLUDED

LA MAISON HOGRELLE

by Leonard H. Nason

NEAR Camp Coetquidan, in Brittany, was the town of Guer. On the outskirts of the town was a combination restaurant and grocery store kept by the widow Hogrelle. When the first Americans arrived in the camp, it was possible to get a supper of broiled chicken, with all the fixings, done in the real French style over an open fire of brush, for five francs (about one dollar, American). Two young girls, Vivienne and Germaine, assisted in serving the patrons. Vivienne was inclined to be a little fleshy, and Germaine had no teeth, but otherwise they were very winsome.

The Americans, however, delighted in astonishing the French by throwing twenty-franc notes about, ordering champagne by the dozen, and otherwise behaving as if they were all millionaires.

This had a very demoralizing effect upon the Maison Hogrelle, and when the writer returned there in the Fall of 1918, after the number of Americans in France had risen from two thousand to two million, the price of a chicken supper was forty francs, champagne extra at fifteen francs the bottle. Vivienne was wearing corsets, so that she looked like a pillow with a string tied about its middle, and Germaine had a set of false teeth.

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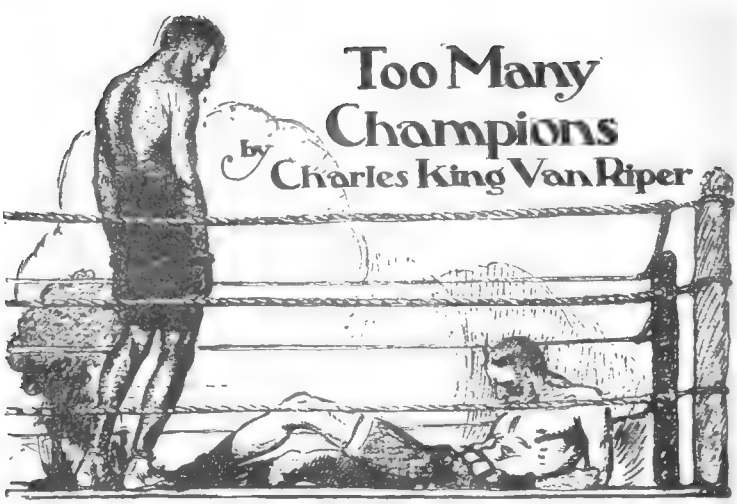

Too Many Champions

by Charles King Van Riper

Author of "Requiem."

THE big gray battleship steamed into Monterey Harbor and let go her anchors as guns, bells and whistles raised a welcoming din. Courtesies were exchanged with the military at the Presidio. A citizens' committee presented the key to the city—which wasn't locked anyway.

Alvarado Street was a lane of flags along its short length from the hill road to the wharf with its cluster of gaily-painted fishing-boats. From the army post on the hill above the town a bugle call was launched into the glancing Californian sunshine. It was an ideal day for a celebration. The citizens' committee was proud of itself.

Up at the Presidio the cavalry garrison was forming for parade. Boat-loads of sailors were coming ashore from the battleship. Their band had been landed and had begun playing on the wharf.

The ship's bandmaster was Lester Payton Hunt. This Hunt was an impractical, temperamental, musical soul. He was a baptized violinist, but as the violin can't be navigated on parade, Hunt's time and talent had been devoted to promoting concord in the band—and trying to get himself out of the Navy.

An impetuous patriotism had led Hunt to enlist for the war, and ever since he had been endeavoring ineffectually to end the arrangement. At every attempt Nathaniel Griggsby would influence him against it. Griggsby was a distinctly influential person, being a captain in the United States Navy and skipper of one of the least nervous and apprehensive of Uncle Sam's dreadnaughts.

Recently Bandmaster Hunt, with only two months more of his enlistment to serve, had been a happy man. Now he was low in his mind, for in an unguarded moment he had let Griggsby mesmerize him into signing on again.

It wasn't that the Old Man cared anything much about music. He used to say, "The only tune I know is 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'" If a band could get through that without running into squally weather and an epidemic of croup he was satisfied. Experience had taught him that any outfit able to do it was a pretty fair sort of band, and the aggregation directed by Lester Payton Hunt was better than any he'd ever had. According to Captain Nathaniel Griggsby it was the best band afloat.

Old Nat also had the best gun-crews, the finest cooks, and in Gunner Catlin the champion light-heavyweight boxer of the Fleet. The presence of this fistic celebrity aboard the battle-wagon made it possible

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for the citizens' committee to frame a great finish for the day of celebration.

The sea-going champion was matched to meet Sergeant Younger, Eleventh Cavalry. The sergeant had earned quite a reputation around Monterey.

There was nothing local about Catlin's championship. He had cleaned up from Bremerton to San Diego, out on the islands and down in Panama. The Gunner had defended his title against all comers, and the Gunner's shipmates were willing to bet that he'd give this Younger a good beating. To be strictly truthful their willingness amounted to almost feverish anxiety.

All the other activities of the day were mere preliminaries. They had to parade but they passed up the rest of the attractions. They had been getting a strong play on their offers to back the Fleet Champion's prowess and the whole ship's company was engaged in the absorbing business of easing itself into the soft money. It looked as if postage stamps would be legal tender in Monterey the next morning.

Early in the afternoon there was the first sign of trouble. Two battered sailors were brought aboard and serviced in the sick bay. About the same time the Post hospital had three emergency cases. The casualties were due to fundamental differences of opinion about the Catlin-Younger battle. Instead of waiting for the fight, the advocates had attempted a personal settlement.

Lieutenant Nelson, officer of the deck, promptly landed more Navy M. P's. Cavalry headquarters doubled its own detail. The precautions came too late. Soldiers and sailors were making a running fight of it, skirmishing around corners and up side streets. Those not at the moment engaged marched belligerently along the main drag looking for trouble.

The citizens' committee was showing signs of distress. Bugles began blowing from the hill and down at the wharf. The defiant factions responded sullenly to the recall, promising plenty of action the next time they met.

CAPTAIN GRIGGSBY came racing up by automobile as his lieutenant, an officer from the Post, and the anxious citizens' committee were discussing the advisability of calling off the fight.

"There's bad feeling between the men," explained one of the civilians.

"What do you expect, gentlemen," Griggsby lectured them sternly under his frowning gray brows. "You can't ask Catlin and this other man to sit around telling Bible stories until time for the fight——"

"But it's the crew, captain, and the men from the Post," protested the committee's spokesman. "There'll be a riot——"

Old Griggsby laughed. It was a reckless laugh, like the engine-room telegraph ringing for full speed ahead. To hear it was to realize that Captain Griggsby would like to see some one try to start a riot.

"I'll answer for the ship," he promised crisply, "and I've no doubt Colonel Duncan will do the same for the Post. Fighting is our proper business, gentlemen. I think you can rely on us to conduct a two-man affair of this sort according to the regulations."

Old Griggsby finished with a snap and his gray eyes swept along the semi-circle of the citizens' committee. There was no comment.

"I regret any disturbance my men may have caused in your city," continued the captain, "and you may rest assured that prompt investigation will be made and the offenders severely dealt with."

One of the committeemen nodded in acknowledgment. It seemed thoroughly understood.

"The Fleet Champion will be ready to go into the ring at four-thirty," the Old Man went on almost genially, "and the bout will proceed according to schedule—unless Colonel Duncan puts the Post in quarantine between now and then."

Griggsby winked broadly and the committeemen left feeling as if they'd been let in on a little joke on the colonel.

"Catlin ready?" was the question he fired at his lieutenant when they were alone.

"All ready, cap'n," came the answer.

"Send for Hunt."

The junior officer speeded the order as Griggsby took a turn on the bridge.

He swung around on Hunt as that sober soul appeared.

"Important duty for you to perform," he growled, glowering at the bandmaster. "If any trouble starts at the fight this afternoon it'll be up to you to stop it."

Lester Payton Hunt was distinctly startled. Mr. Hunt was not a man to

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start trouble and he was hardly the one to stop it. Why had the captain picked on him? It seemed like a conspicuously poor choice. The bandmaster hadn't even intended to go to the fight. He didn't like fights: Brutal, crunching blows against flesh and bone, spattered blood on naked, sweating bodies.

"Our men and that job-lot up on the hill may try to mix things up on the side," the captain was saying, "and if they do——" Griggsby held his musical genius with a cold and glittering eye.

"If they do," repeated the terrifying old man, "I want you to bring them up standing!"

The captain wheeled and strode off, hands behind his back with one doubled into a powerful fist and whacking the palm of the other. At six paces he turned with a challenging—

"Understand?"

"Yes, sir," faltered Mr. Hunt, and gathering a flicker of courage inquired, "Are there any instructions as to *how* I'm to do it?"

"How in thunder would you do it?" roared Griggsby, then, realizing that up to this moment he had neglected to mention the means he had in mind, the old villain reduced speed.

"Nearly forgot that," he admitted with a chuckle. "If anything like a riot starts, strike up the national anthem. I want every man brought to attention instantly."

"Yes, sir," answered the Pacific Fleet's crack bandmaster, promptly and with discernible relief. It was much simpler than he had supposed. He would not be called on to subdue his boisterous shipmates with physical force. There would be no call for the band to turn out with clubs and sidearms. It was to be something in the regular line of duty.

"That's all, Mr. Hunt," said the Old man Man with a weather-beaten smile.

The ship's bandmaster saluted and left. He had to go to the fight, but he was philosophically submissive. Things could have been so much worse.

NOW if Captain Griggsby ever had any idea that "Blaze" Duncan, colonel of cavalry, would side-step by a fictitious quarantine or any other subterfuge the obligation of supplying an opponent for the Fleet Champion, the captain had made an error. That was something Griggsby seldom did. In fact Blaze Duncan had told him at the Chamber of Commerce luncheon that the Fleet Champion would that very afternoon be knocked loose from his moorings. Sergeant Younger, of C Troop, was the boy who would do it, declared the colonel. And while sailors and cavalrymen in the fervor of violent partisanship were making the streets unsafe for the local democracy, Old Griggsby and Blaze Duncan were shaking hands under the speakers' table to bind a neat wager on the outcome.

The scene of the afternoon's battle was an out-door ring on a flat bench of land about half-way down a hillside on the military reservation. The men of Colonel Duncan's command were marched there under orders, fifteen minutes before the first of the preliminaries was scheduled to begin.

They came swinging along to the tune of, "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," and broke with a cheer and a scrambling for places at the order to fall out.

Five minutes later there came crashing on the wind brass, wood and drums in, "Strike Up the Band, Here Comes a Sailor." To be exact there were four hundred sailors marching up the main road of the reservation behind Lester Payton Hunt and his band.

When the head of the column swung off the road, the assembled soldiery gave them a terrific razzing.

The band turned out of line as the sailors came marching on, massed at the top of the slope and at the order that released them swept like a blue tide down the brown hillside.

In the stampede for places there was a shouted exchange of incivilities between the factions: Hoots, cat-calls, taunts and defiance. At the boundary of the seated camps on the hillside a double patrol stood guard, both Army and Navy M. P.'s watching the dangerous border.

Beyond the ring the ground declined precipitously toward the bay. The gallery overlooked a far-flung panorama of distant hills and wide blue water, with the flag-dressed ship riding off-shore.

In front of the tiers of men on the slope above the ring, Captain Griggsby and Blaze Duncan were side by side among those who had the seats of honor. Flanking the roped square were the bands—Lester Payton Hunt's drawn up facing the north and

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the bay. Across the ring from the hostile camps of spectators two pyramidal tents had been pitched as dressing-rooms for the fighters and their handlers. From one of these presently emerged a group of men and, as the one with the megaphone climbed through the ropes the uproar tailed off into an undertone.

In the first of the preliminaries one of the ship's Filipino mess-boys bested Bugler Stanloski. The Army evened things up in the second bout when Adams, a blacksmith from the service troop, took the measure of Skelton, a big hod who belonged to Griggsby's black gang.

This set the stage for the event of the afternoon: Gunner Catlin against Sergeant Younger. It may as well be admitted that the Sergeant and the Gunner were going to settle things for several afternoons to come.

The "grudge fights" of the professional ring are tea-parties compared to these battles between men in the service. They are more than mere sport. One punch may bring on a financial panic.

Every man among the onlookers sees something different in the ring: $3.85, $5, $10 or, among the plutocratic crap-shooters, anything from $50 to $1000 according to how good the dice have been to them. Probably Lester Payton Hunt was the only individual in the immediate vicinity of the ring who didn't have something up on the fight.

Catlin and Younger were in their corners, the Gunner wearing a blue and white striped bath-robe and his opponent in a cavalry slicker with bare legs making an unmilitary appearance through the saddle-cut at the back.

There were shouts of—"Sailor!"

"Come on, Gunner!"

"Oh you, Sarge!"

"Show 'em what the cavalry can do!"

Catlin smiled up at his ship-mates as he loosened the bath-robe. Younger seemed nervous, studying his lithe, smooth-muscled foe. The sergeant himself was anything but impressive-looking with his bare shanks showing under the rain-coat.

But how he did strip!

BLAZE DUNCAN'S cavalryman was a duplicate of Bob Fitzsimmons—except for the freckles. He had a reach that must have been the terror of the mess-hall, and wide shoulders sloping into a tremendous chest.

Old Griggsby shot a swift glance at Colonel Duncan who kept on smiling with serene confidence at the high-powered fighting machine that the discarding of the slicker had revealed. Then the captain's eyes went back to the ring. This wouldn't be sub-caliber practice. Gunner Catlin was going to have to score a hit or run the risk of being torpedoed without warning.

The Pacific Fleet Champion advanced to the center of the ring with the sun bronzing his tanned body. Younger was a pasty-white by comparison. The tips of their gloves touched, the referee darted back and the men began circling.

"Can he take punishment?" asked old Griggsby.

"Sleeps in the mule corral," declared Blaze Duncan without taking his eyes from the ring where Younger had side-stepped a left with which the Gunner was trying him out. It was that coiled right of Catlin's that carried the dynamite.

Younger led for the jaw. Catlin, without retreating, moved his head, made him miss, then, stepping in, drove a murderous right at the sergeant's face. The wild cheering of the sailors stopped short, for Younger had taken the full force of the blow without budging. His face was bloody but he was standing toe to toe with Catlin and slugging. The bell ended it.

This was the chance for the rival rooting sections. Three M. P.'s were subduing a trooper who had gone outlaw at the prospect of doubling his stake. The rest of the club-carrying chaperons kept on the move to prevent the more promising arguments from getting beyond verbal limits.

Catlin and Younger came up like tigers at the bell. They charged together with a shock that sounded over the roar of the fight-mad crowd.

What followed was as strange as it was terrifying. Neither had clinched as they met and now the two men stood rooted in the center of the ring battering each other.

There was a swift whirl of swinging arms with the impact of each crashing blow as distinct as the thumping of a drum.

Griggsby and Duncan were on their feet and so was every last man behind them. Somebody else was on one of Lester Payton Hunt's feet. He rescued the extremity at the first opportunity.

Catlin's bronzed arms and the white ones of Younger were moving like steam-driven

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pistons. The two men kept it up beyond the endurance of those who were watching, until the onlookers' lungs were bruised and burning and their muscles swollen weights of aching fiber. Catlin and Younger stood still like battling Titans, rocking under the thunderbolt blows.

The silence of exhaustion was over the crowd, listening in physical agony to the tortured breathing of the men and groans wrenched through pain-twisted lips as resounding fists crushed in on flesh and bone. Over these other sounds there was suddenly a snap like the cracking of a great whip.

At the same instant the fighters backed away from each other and the crowd as if released from an hypnotic trance howled in frenzy. The two men in the ring were reeling toward each other, Gunner Catlin shifting drunkenly to drive in his right, Younger stood swaying, his guard down.

The Gunner's fist caught the tottering sergeant flush on the jaw. He dropped like a butchered ox.

The referee was counting. A thousand furies were loosed on the hillside, shrill exultation and hoarse defiance. A cavalryman and two sailors went to fighting and, as the M.P.s piled on them, the riot spread like wildfire through the mob.

Lester Payton Hunt was dancing up and down in front of his band, frantically waving his baton. No one was paying the slightest attention to him.

"—Two—Three——" the referee was counting.

Old Griggsby disregarded the uproar in the rear and sat crouched forward watching the referee make Gunner Catlin's victory official. The Pacific Fleet Champion stood, weaving unsteadily, his head forward and sagging between shoulders that heaved and fell with each sobbing breath. There was a set, foolish grin on his opened lips.

"Four—"

Griggsby's weather-beaten smile broadened. Sergeant Younger hadn't moved.

From the ringside the ship's band began dismally—

Oh say can you see——

"—Five—"

Now the full force of the band swung into action and rolled out a musically emotional—

—by the dawn's early light——

The effect was electrifying. This was old Griggsby's band, the best in the fleet, and Lester Payton Hunt with a sidewise glance at the havoc on the hillside was urging his tribe to outdo themselves.

"—Six—"

—At the twilight's last gleaming——

The roaring riot on the slope came to an abrupt end. Unconsciously Griggsby was standing erect. Spurred by success the band swept on in triumph. Griggsby's reckoning had been right. The magnificent rhythm of the national anthem held the men motionless—at attention.

Every eye was on the tableau in the ring: The victorious sailor, the beaten cavalryman, and the fatal figure of the referee carrying on the count.

"—Seven—Eight——"

The band came in a crashing crescendo to

—Bombs bursting in air——

Never had the measures been played so gloriously. Order had been brought out of the first headstrong burst of riot. Old Griggsby took his eyes from the Champion Catlin to glance proudly at his band. He could feel the battle hymn like a chant in his blood. Then came the supreme tribute to Lester Payton Hunt's genius.

Sergeant Younger began getting groggily to his feet.

The music had reached into the sergeant's dimmed consciousness to touch a discipline that had become instinctive. They were playing "The Star-Spangled Banner": He must stand up! The music was literally lifting Younger out of defeat.

"Stop that band!" bellowed Griggsby, but it was too late.

The sergeant was again facing Catlin. The champion's expression did not change. If he saw Younger at all it was only as a misty shadow in front of him, but instinctively the Gunner began to gather his historic right hand.

Younger was wabbling around without any attempt to defend himself, his arms hanging at his sides.

The Gunner's deadly right was moving deliberately to its ordained purpose. There was a fascination in the cruel certainty of the result. Up it came—and out—then, astoundingly: Back!

—the land of the free.

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Catlin was saluting.

Sergeant Younger stirred, stumbled forward with his left arm swinging listlessly and Catlin went over backward, rigid from heels to head and with his famous right still at salute. Younger had given more of a push than a punch, but what the blow failed to do resulted from the fall. The champion was out—cold.

Lester Payton Hunt cut short the last note with a slash of his baton and flushed with success swung around.

SIMULTANEOUSLY the thwarted riot burst out with explosive violence. Sailors and cavalrymen were fighting in pairs, gangs and mobs. Lester Payton Hunt was in a panic. Should he repeat the piece? He looked beseechingly toward the captain. Griggsby and Blaze Duncan were watching helplessly the reign of terror on the hillside.

In the ring the referee finished the count of ten and turned from the fallen champion to lift Sergeant Younger's hand in victory. He caught the fighter's wrist, lifted—and Younger with a scream of pain pitched forward on his face.

The shrill agony of the cry struck the rioters into stunned silence.

Old Griggsby and a doctor were through the ropes. Their heads were together as they bent over Younger.

"I thought that was it," declared the doctor.

Griggsby stood up and faced the men.

"Sergeant Younger's arm is broken," said the captain, then the old sea-lion roared, "Fall in!"

A chance to make himself heard was all Griggsby needed to override the mob.

He turned to Lester Payton Hunt.

"March them back to the ship," he commanded, "and as soon as you go aboard make out your application for discharge."

"Colonel," said the genial tyrant squinting an eye at Blaze Duncan, "we had you licked—until——"

"My compliments, captain," replied the cavalryman. "The finest band on the Pacific Coast."

Then the Old Man paid the bet.

Plants on LIFE

The Last Voyage

by Bill Adams

I HAVE a very great delight in writing. It is fine. It is like going swimming at sunrise, or like picking up the mainsail bunt in a moon-lighted Horn gale, or like any number of things that make one's life a happy thing. I wish that I could write in such a way as to leave a blossom flowering when I sail to the last haven. Just not to have lived for nothing. One wants to do one's bit, doesn't one?

Oh, yes. One wants to get to the very heart of no end of a hard fight and to hit fast, hard and true—going down with a light laugh if down one must go. And if victorious, lifting a fallen foe with the same laugh and the hand of friendship, eh? Isn't that so?

There really is nothing to beat a man's life, is there?

For instance—don't you suppose that when the old rusty-bowed clippers go booming through the last sea, carrying the scarred souls of many a tough old mariner toward the wharf whose bollards are made of gold, don't you suppose now that the Great Superintendent of the fleets will say to the angels:

"Cease your harping, boys—hold on, now—steady all hands, a bit," and add, "Hush, here they come—let's listen to their rousing chantey—that's real music, boys."

Don't you rather reckon that, all said and done, the song of a human man is, through all the long years, of greater worth than the harping of myriads of angels, eh?

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The Jade Ax

a complete novelette by J. D. Newsom

Author of "In the Rain," "Salvage," etc.

IN THE dawn of the world, so runs the legend, when there was nothing but blue water beneath the blue sky, a dust speck fell from the hair on the head of Tavale sitting at a great feast among the stars.

The dust speck fell into the seas which foamed and boiled at the impact and where there had been but water there emerged an island, the island of Erumboma.

Tavale came down from the stars and walked upon the dry land. There were high hills and narrow gorges, trees and bushes and running streams. Tavale called upon the other gods to join him but they refused and he wandered alone among the hills until the silence oppressed him and he fashioned a man from the trunk of a *kuho*-tree and a woman from its branches. To these he gave Erumboma and they were his children.

But the other gods, growing jealous of Tavale, imitated him until the sea growled beneath a burden it could not shake off.

Other men appeared on these islands, but they were roughly fashioned and crude. Tavale's pair were peaceful and industrious, the others were savage and warlike. They heard of Erumboma and built canoes to raid it. By this time Tavale's man and woman were old and worn with toil, and their children, though many, knew nothing of violence. When their despoilers approached they fled from the shore to the hills.

And the old man prayed to Tavale, standing on the highest peak that his prayer might carry to the skies, and Tavale saw and heard.

His voice rang out of the clouds which were blackened by his wrath.

"Your bellies are full of food," he growled, "but your arms are weak. Your children are cowards who fly before the crookedest spear in the hands of the youngest child."

"O Tavale," wailed the old man, "we had no use for weapons!"

"Then make them! It is not too late."

"O Tavale, we have not the knowledge. Help us, for already our enemies climb out of the valley."

"Then the sea is lost to you forever," thundered Tavale. "But you shall keep the hills, for there I made you."

Lightning struck at the old man's feet and for a space he was blinded. When he opened his eyes he saw lying on the ground before him a great ax with a round head of polished jade. Its shaft was of smooth *kuho*-wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and there were frigate-bird feathers tied in tufts about the handle.

"Take this and slay your enemies," came Tavale's voice, roaring in the wind. "Lose it—and you shall be blotted out. Keep it—and the hills are yours."

The old man felt Tavale's strength surge through him. He picked up the ax and slew the invaders; not one of them reached the high hills. They retreated to the valleys by the sea where they maintained a foothold.

And in the hills the people of Tavale lived

"The Jade Ax," copyright, 1923, by J. D. Newsom.

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on, worshiping the ax as the sign of their deliverance, fully convinced that its loss would spell their extinction.

TIME passed, customs changed. The coastal tribes warred against the mountain folk, traded and intermarried and fought again. Still the ax lay undisturbed in a hut built on the summit of the highest peak.

Then came the white man and with him the passing of the old order. A planter settled on the east coast, a missionary to the south. Wars were no more, customs vanished. But the ax with its milk-jade head still lay in the hut where the old men worshipped.

Few white men were privileged to see it. Some died beneath the swing of its keen green edge, those who lived carried the tale of its smooth splendor and fine workmanship from island to island. The news spread slowly from trader's house to port-side saloon, thence by devious ways to curators of museums. Vultures in the guise of collectors flocked to Erumboma offering money in the name of science for the soul of a people. But the Kanakas, though they bartered their war-clubs for tobacco and their carved door-posts for bad gin, refused to part with the ax, for it was the central emblem of their tribal life, the very cause of their survival. They beat off the vultures—sometimes with words, more often with clenched fists.

These rebuffs shocked the vultures, but a certain manufacturer in a dingy back street of Birmingham became interested when the British Museum let it be known that it would offer anything up to one thousand pounds for the specimen. The Birmingham manufacturer specialized in forged antiques—Egyptian scarabs, Assyrian tablets, Thibetan prayer-wheels, Papuan bird-and-crocodile bowls, Polynesian paddle-heads—and he saw no reason why the Erumboma ax should not be triplicated and sold simultaneously to as many museums.

Accordingly he dispatched an expensive cable to his buyer, Sigfried Reissler, who was at the time sunning himself in Sydney.

Reissler being a tame, gorged vulture obeyed his marching orders without hesitation. Erumboma, he discovered, lay at the southern end of the New Hebrides, off the beaten track, and was only to be reached by way of New Caledonia which was in regular touch with Australia by means of a steamer no larger than a fair-sized tug. The journey to Noumea, the capital of New Caledonia, occupied exactly five days.

"This vill be easy," thought Reissler. "I shall be back in Sydney in a month."

But his hopes were shattered when he discovered that he must wait, marooned in Noumea, for at least five weeks before he could make a connection for Erumboma.

He resigned himself to his fate and betook himself to the Hotel Malzerbe where he settled down to wait. For him the time did not drag, he found a thousand things to do and to watch.

He sat one morning on the balcony of the hotel and sipped ecstatically at a glass of peppermint cordial. His eyes were half-closed, his hands, palms upturned and slack, rested on his thighs, his short body was all relaxed, inert, imprisoned between the arms of the wicker chair which he filled and overflowed.

At first glance Sigfried Reissler might have been thought to be in a comatose state of blissful laziness. He was not. His restless feet in their patent-leather shoes tapped ceaselessly on the floor, his mouth was tense and his round head instead of reclining on the back of the chair was thrust slightly forward and to one side. He was listening.

There was really nothing to listen to except the noises that fill such hotels as the Malzerbe at ten in the morning, but Reissler beneath his somnolent appearance was straining every sense to catch some unexpected and therefore enjoyable sound.

He had two vices: Peppermint and curiosity. He stinted neither.

The balcony where he sat ran the whole length of the second story of the building where the guest-rooms were situated. This was a coign of vantage not to be despised for it was cool, shaded, accessible and all-embracing. From his station he could observe the door of the dining-room and see exactly how many cognacs Mr. Villars, the ship chandler, poured into his breakfast coffee, he could keep an eye on the kitchen and watch the slovenly black cook slapping food onto plates, and he had unobstructed view of the garden, the road and the sunlit bay of Noumea.

There were four palm trees in the garden, a bed of dusty roses and a bench where the proprietor, who was inured to mosquitoes,

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sat every evening for one-quarter of an hour, no more no less. Reissler had timed him over several days.

The road beyond the palings was more interesting. It ran past the hotel from the smelting factory to the post-office and all kinds of people used it, from Kanakas, black and sullen, in filthy rags, to managing directors of mines dashing about in Fords.

And then there was the sea, clear and sparkling, caught between great hills that went back and back into the purple distance.

But Reissler that morning had no eyes for the scenery, or Mr. Villars or the cook. He was tingling with excitement because a new guest had come in the night to the Hotel Malzerbe and had been lodged in room No. 7, two doors removed from his own.

He had made inquiries and had been told by the ever-grumpy landlord that the newcomer was a woman. Just that: "A woman." No name, no age, no description. A woman! From the Javanese waiter he gleaned the fact that she had come in on a schooner from the Loyalty Islands. She might be a trader's wife, a missionary—but nobody knew. Reissler found the suspense delightfully agonizing.

Breakfast had been served in her room by a maid who had subsequently refused to be interviewed.

Reissler sucked at his peppermint cordial and waited. Once he tip-toed along the balcony and listened at the door of No. 7 while he pretended to light a cigaret with stubborn matches. He could hear her moving about, pounding heavily in thick-soled shoes.

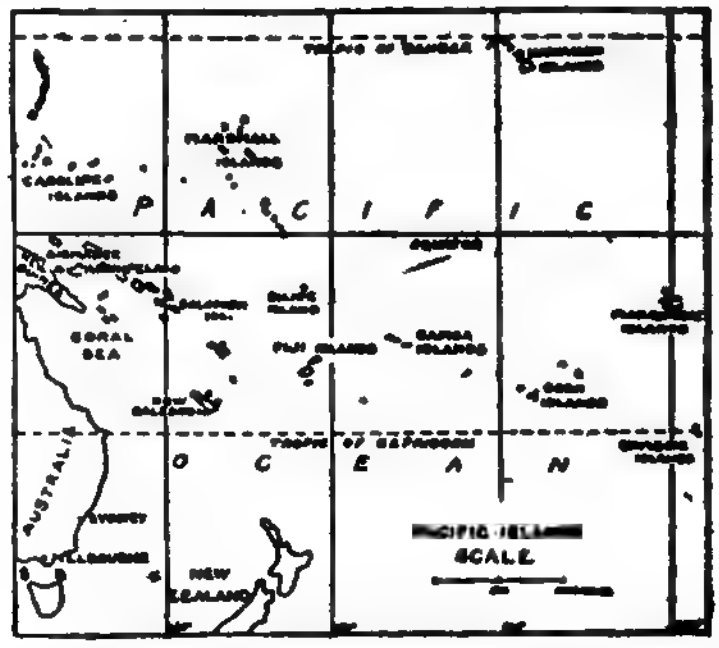
"Missionary," decided Reissler going back to his chair.

At noon the stranger emerged, stared through him and marched down the stairs to the dining-room. Reissler gaped after her, taking in every detail of her appearance.

She must be at least forty-five, he decided, and he did not like her face. It was too man-of-the-worldish. Her skin was tanned a rich mahogany; her nose was long, thin and straight, formidable; her eyes were shrewd; her mouth was drawn up at the corners in a slightly sardonic smile, and her chin was entirely too firm. She wore a skirt of heavy linen and a coat to match, very baggy at the elbows.

"That is not a missionary," Reissler told himself. "That mouth is all wrong. But vat is she then? Py golly, vat is she?"

Then he went down to the dining-room and sat as close to her as possible. She refused to look at him and only spoke to the proprietor in French, a language Reissler had previously disdained.



But he felt certain that she must speak English, and over the California peaches and New Zealand cream he remarked—

"Py golly, it is hot in this place, but when I was in the Trobriands——"

"I've heard that one before," rudely commented an acid little Australian at the foot of the table. "I'll match you, Reissler: When I was in Brisbane——"

She got up and left the room. Reissler watched her with anguished eyes and, unable to resist, dashed off in pursuit. He found her sitting in the garden, just sitting, looking self-composed and angular.

"Ve are neighbors," said Reissler by way of introduction as he sat down beside her. "Such a nice garden. The pretty roses! You like roses?"

She stared at him curiously, the corners of her mouth twitching.

"Yes," she admitted, "I like roses."

Reissler felt hot and very uncomfortable. He blundered on:

"Such a pretty island! You know it well perhaps?"

"Quite well," she answered. "I landed during the night."

So it went on until Reissler asked tentatively—

"You find mission work interesting?"

"It must be," she conceded, and looking at her wrist-watch she jumped up and left him to the contemplation of the pretty roses.

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He found out that afternoon that her name was Gordon, Miss C. Gordon. It was entered in a round hand in the hotel register, and she came from New York, N. Y., U. S. A.

"Business woman," decided Reissler. "Vat she want down here, anyway?"

The question obsessed him, Miss Gordon obsessed him. In fact, her calm, unfriendly ways frightened him so much that he was driven to take extreme steps.

TWO days later when he saw her go down the road toward the post-office he sidled down the balcony and halted by the door of her room. He pretended to look with great interest at the shipping in the harbor while his hands behind his back fumbled with the latch.

He found the best of excuses for his conduct. She might be anything. It was not natural for a woman to travel about alone. She might be a criminal. No decent persons made secrets of their professions.

The latch gave with a slight click and the door responded to the pressure of his finger tips. No one was in sight—road, garden and balcony were alike deserted. He stepped back quickly into the shadows.

On tip-toes, breathing fast, he scanned the room. A trunk caught his predacious eye—but it was locked. He grumbled and turned to rummage in the wardrobe. The drawers screeched as he opened them; they were all empty.

On a table by the bed he saw books and magazines and over these he bent with little hope but much energy.

The first volume he picked up was entitled, "The Undying Fire" by one H. G. Wells.

"Spooks, most likely," grunted Reissler and threw it back on the table.

Then a magazine in a blue cover caught his eye and his forehead grew damp. He pulled it out. His unbelievable suspicion was confirmed. It was the "American Anthropologist."

"Vat she do with this thing?" pondered Reissler, fending off the truth.

He snatched up other journals, they all told him the same story—there was a pamphlet on Melanesian stone implements, another on the lashings of out-rigger canoes, another on kinship terms.

At last he admitted the awful truth to himself. She must be interested in native customs—perhaps she was a collector, perhaps—here Reissler softly left the room and closed the door behind him—perhaps she was going to Erumboma.

Once safely back in his chair with a fresh glass of peppermint cordial beside him he decided that he must find out something positive or else spend his days in nerve-racking doubt.

He launched his attack as soon as Miss Gordon returned, an hour later, from her walk.

"Ah," he said as she endeavored to pass him by. "It is dull here, yes? Perhaps you would like to see some pretty native work. It will interest you. I have a nice piece of tapa cloth——"

He thrust the stuff at her.

"Good design," she admitted.

"Ain't it?" purred Reissler.

"That's not New Caledonian work," she went on. "That's Samoan, made for the tourist trade, or I'm much mistaken."

She *was* a professional! Reissler's anguish increased as he exclaimed:

"Miss Gordon, you are clever! Wonderful indeed. Collecting such things is my business, yet I find it hard to distinguish the two techniques."

"I have had a good deal of practice, too," she admitted.

"Then we are in the same trade!"

As soon as the words passed his lips he sensed his mistake. Her mouth smiled, however, as she said:

"I am collecting specimens for several museums, but it is hardly a lucrative trade. Perhaps you are more fortunate?"

"So, so," he hedged. "Sometimes good, sometimes bad. What d'you think I am doing here—I tell you: I am going to Erumboma——"

"Are you?" For the first time Miss Gordon seemed to take an interest in the voluble little man.

"Yes—the hill tribes are said to have an ax——"

"I want it too," she declared. "It's going to be quite a sporting event."

Reissler felt his heart leap into his throat and choke him. He was afraid of this woman. She was far too determined and efficient. She was dangerous.

"But my dear Miss Gordon," he exclaimed in dismay. "Erumboma—it is a savage place, not like Noumea. And this is bad enough for a lady. Up there it is

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still more primitive. You must not go, listen, I speak for your good."

"Really?" she smiled at him tolerantly. "I am afraid I shall have to disappoint you. I am going."

"Fever," he went on, drawing on his imagination. "Cannibals, no hotels. Most dangerous place!"

"I am sailing on the *Cuvier* in four days' time. I suppose you will be traveling on the same boat."

"It is a bad ship," urged Reissler, and then because her face was inflexible he blurted out:

"If you do not go, and you should not, I will tell you what I will do. You shall have the very finest copy——"

"Copy?"

"Yes, and at half price. No one can detect the difference."

"That's why you called your vocation a trade," Miss Gordon's voice was cool as ice. "Fakes!"

"No, no! Reproductions. Splendid work," insisted Reissler. "And you can have it——"

"I am not interested in forgeries however clever," broke in Miss Gordon, a light of battle in her eyes. "Now, I must be going."

And all social intercourse between them abruptly came to an end.

Twenty-four hours later Reissler again tried to break into her room with the vague intention of removing—temporarily—her ticket, her passport, her money, something or other that would cripple her. He found the door locked and as he fumbled with the latch Miss Gordon came up the steps, quite softly, and he sprang back guiltily.

"The next time I find you trying to force my door," she said placidly, "I shall call the landlord. He seems to be quite a powerful man."

"I assure you—" stammered Reissler.

But the door closed in his face and he was left to stare helplessly at the green painted panel. Then he really lost his temper and momentarily forgot to be afraid.

He had been snubbed and insulted by an arrogant woman who refused to heed his warnings. She deserved no pity. He hated her smiling mouth and level eyes. He would not allow her to interfere with his business. Of course it was a trade—his business—any fool could see that. People wanted native rubbish to put in glass cases, what did it matter whether they bought copies or originals?

The day before the *Cuvier* was due to sail he became so desperate that he thought of a possible way out of his dilemma. He proceeded to carry out his plan without delay and approached the villainous black cook who listened with great interest, once he had pocketed a fifty-franc note and a small packet which Reissler gave him together with very minute instructions as to the disposal of its contents.

The *Cuvier* left harbor at six o'clock the next morning and Miss Gordon was not on board. She lay on her bed at the Hotel Malzerbe, snoring heavily, suffering the not unpleasant effects of a slight overdose of morphin.

What she said when she struggled back to consciousness is of no importance. She said it, however, several times. Then she dressed and sought out the landlord. Ten minutes later a villainous-looking black cook was out of work without any reference as to his character.

"You must lodge a complaint," declared the proprietor. "That man Reissler, he must be arrested. If ever I see him again——"

"No," said Miss Gordon. "I have no time to waste making complaints. How can I reach Erumboma?"

"Madame!" begged the proprietor. "Do not go. That criminal will be there."

"Is he going to stay with a planter or somebody?"

"With a Mr. Drewitt. A young man, very amiable. He stays with me when he comes——"

"There is a missionary up there too, I believe. Now, if I could only leave at once——"

"Do not think of it! It is a folly what you propose."

"I can take care of myself."

"In that case," said the proprietor, coming to the conclusion that all American women were mad, "perhaps madame could obtain accommodation on the mission schooner. It is a possibility."

Miss Gordon found all at once that her troubles were vanishing. Not only was she given a cabin on the schooner, but she met the Reverend Arnold Miller, of Erumboma, who was on his way back to the island after a brief period of relaxation. He was a solemn gentleman concealing a most egocentric mentality behind a grave and dignified exterior.

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He was, at least, quite harmless and when he assured Miss Gordon that— "Our little vessel will reach Erumboma long before the *Cuvier*, for the latter craft must needs make an infinite number of calls on the way, don't you know?" she was ready to forgive him all his sins, and to show her gratitude she took charge of the three native women converts traveling on the schooner, trying to teach them the rudiments of needle-work.

"How splendid of you!" said Miller. "We need devoted ladies like yourself. My poor girls lack supervision and I am *so* clumsy with my fingers, don't you know?"

"Indeed," said Miss Gordon.

THE Reverend Arnold Miller had been away from Erumboma less than three weeks when trouble broke out at the mission school. He had left his flock in the care of a native teacher who developed a sudden desire to emulate monkish practises and blew conch-shells at two in the morning to summon the people to prayer. They answered the call with reluctance, dragging their tired bodies to chapel where between hymns they slept while the enthusiast in the pulpit preached from inaccurate and unintelligible texts.

Their daily routine suffered. They neglected their gardens and that of the Rev. Miller, they forgot their lessons, they quarreled and fretted.

Even Wonotu, the star pupil, became bored. When Miller, in person, guided the activities of the mission Wonotu found the dullness bearable, for then physical exertion was tolerated rather than encouraged and work with a spade, however slight, was admired and praised.

In the village, on the other hand, the unconverted heathens spent their days in toil either in their own fields or in those of the white planter, Mr. Drewitt. It was an exacting life, even its pleasures were violent—there were great feasts and wild dances and an occasional raid on the people of the hills just to show that men were still men despite the laws of strangers.

At the school there were no dances, no feasts, no fights, but as it exacted a minimum of labor from its pupils it made converts.

Wonotu attended three successive services at dead o' night, then he remonstrated with the native preacher who flung wise saws at him and reminded him that meekness and humbleness should be practised by all followers of the white man's faith.

That day Wonotu stole a bottle full of inferior brandy from the Rev. Miller's medicine-chest—all the house servants were asleep—and drank half of it at a gulp. He was gripped by a great longing to see his own kin that he might insult them and he set off forthwith to satisfy his desire. He discarded his clothes before leaving and went abroad in the loin-cloth of his ancestors. Under one arm he carried the brandy bottle.

He skirted the coast, going lazily beneath the coconut-trees and sang coarse songs at the hills. He was very much annoyed because they shook and trembled in a most alarming fashion. He decided to punish them, but when he bumped into a tree trunk he forgot all about his resolve, for the bottle slid from under his arm and splintered on the stony soil.

When he reached the village his annoyance deepened to anger. Most of his close relations were making copra for Drewitt and there was no one to play with him except a young cousin, Punima, whom he despised.

They talked theology and compared ghosts. Punima scoffed at the new religion.

"Your gods," he said, "make you wear clothes. They are afraid of nakedness. It is not decent to hide a man's fine body beneath many rags."

Because Wonotu really thought the same thing he became very angry and declared in a loud voice that his particular faith was the source of all enlightenment, which had nothing to do with the subject under discussion.

They became more and more heated and their angry tones drew the tribesmen from their huts. Wonotu was in a minority of one, but the brandy made him say rash, regrettable things.

To close the argument he struck his cousin when the latter refused to slander Tavale, the great spirit. He struck him and stamped on his face. Just in time he remembered the onlookers and fled from the village pursued by stones and curses.

He was driven inland toward the hills and the desire to make disciples still being strong within him, he decided to pay a visit to the mountain tribe. They were heathens to the last man and Wonotu made a gorgeous resolve to convert them all.

His muscles were flabby and his breath

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was short. His progress was slow and grew slower still when he began to climb. He spent the night in a gorge between gloomy cliffs and in the awful darkness he prayed fervently—to Tavale, because he was afraid of ghosts.

Dawn found him sober, hungry and, once again, Christian. He pushed on from ridge to ridge until at last he reached the group of huts where the people fed him and listened to his version of mission life. They were so hospitable that he lingered for two days and joined in a dance given by an elder to celebrate the erection of a new hut.

On this occasion Wonotu first saw Tawia, a strapping girl of sixteen, who led the women in the harvest-dance.

Wonotu fell in love and reverted to type. He decided to make the girl his wife, but her parents had other plans for her future. When approached they declined the honor. Tawia, they said, was promised to a rich youth who had already paid nine pigs as a retaining fee.

Wonotu waited until nearly dawn when the women straggled back to their huts and then struck Tawia over the head with a rock. Laboring beneath her weight he made haste to depart.

She had the misfortune to revive just as he carried her along a narrow track clinging to the brow of a hill not five hundred yards from the village. Her bellows were heard by her people and her work-hardened fingers played havoc with Wonotu's thick hair. He tried to hurry but the foolish woman impeded his progress. Finally, in despair, for the village folk were gaining on him, he let Tawia drop off his shoulder down the precipitous slope. She broke her neck and died.

Wonotu shook off his pursuers and, his immediate craving for diversion having been sufficiently appeased he went back to the mission school, which he reached at seven o'clock one Saturday morning.

He slipped quietly into his bright little room while the pupils were attending matins, donned his trousers, his singlet and his shoes, and went meekly to his pew where with upturned eyes and folded hands he joined in the lusty singing of stirring hymns.

IN THE course of a career not entirely devoid of danger Miss Gordon had met many men and observed them at first with interest, later with compassion, which perhaps accounted for her rather sardonic smile and her great self-control. Her knowledge of her fellow-creatures was extensive. She was at home on lecture platforms, she had watched as an honored guest the initiation of girls—it had made her very sick—among the head-hunters of Malaita, and she knew exactly how to deal with rough-and-ready whites adrift in the Pacific.

She belonged to the new order—it is not much older than Plato—which calls things by their proper names and looks upon romanticism and sentiment as twin blights. Because of her modern outlook on life, because she was a quite broad-minded person she found the Reverend Arnold Miller somewhat trying.

He spoke fluently and his voice had an agreeable ring which he himself thoroughly enjoyed, but he could talk for minutes on end and say absolutely nothing. Once started he was vague to the point of incoherence and had to be carefully jockeyed back from the realm of pure thought.

For three days, on board the mission schooner, Miss Gordon tried to find out what he knew about the famous jade ax. He missed the point each time, and wasted hours deprecating the conduct of Mr. Drewitt, his only white neighbor on Erumboma.

Mr. Drewitt, it appeared, was uninterested in the civilizing influence of true religion. Openly he encouraged the tribesmen to stand by their age-old beliefs and was directly responsible for the missionary's lack of success among the hillsmen.

"He says," plaintively echoed Miller, "that the pagans are better workers—as if *that* mattered!"

"How long will it take me to reach the inland village?" doggedly inquired Miss Gordon for the fiftieth time.

"I shall accompany you," asserted the missionary. "I have such gentle, sure-footed horses! Real stanch friends. I am sure you will love them. I purchased them from Mr. Drewitt who—don't think me uncharitable—will not bear in mind the fact that he should set a good example as a matter of principle. Only last month he attended a heathen festival——"

And so on.

Again Miss Gordon resumed her attack—

"I suppose some inducement can be found to make these people part with the weapon?"

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"Oh, undoubtedly. You have so much tact! I assure you the chief will be only too pleased to dispose of it. He is on friendly terms with Mr. Drewitt, but I am positive that if he is properly treated and if you will allow me to present your case——"

Miller's inability to give a single definite answer exasperated Miss Gordon, but because she was his guest she held back all the obvious and unpleasant things she longed to say.

"I do wish I could meet this Drewitt person," she thought. "*He* might be worth knowing."

It was Saturday. New Caledonia had disappeared in the night below the horizon and the schooner crawled across an unbroken waste of water.

Miller was in high glee.

"Tomorrow," he said, "we reach my little parish. It is too charming for words. I am sure you will love it."

"Won't it inconvenience you, coming up into the hills with me?" asked Miss Gordon, groping for an excuse.

"Pleasure," Miller asserted. "Great pleasure—if you don't mind waiting just a day or so until I greet my little family and set my house to rights."

"I could go alone. You know I shall only have twenty-four hours' start on that odious Reissler."

"To be sure, but there is ample time and, really, I could not dream of letting you go unaccompanied. With me you will be perfectly safe and your chances of success will be much improved."

"I don't know——"

"Do trust me. Your—ah—competitor will have to travel twice as far to reach the hills. He may find Mr. Drewitt an asset but I doubt it. Mr. Drewitt has cheapened himself so!"

Quite early the next morning the schooner reached Erumboma. They went ashore to be greeted by three-score natives forming a choral guard of honor from the beach to the mission house, which was a large, solidly built dwelling surrounded by shade trees and well-tended flower-beds. A short distance away stood the chapel and two long rows of whitewashed huts where the pupils lived. Beyond were the cultivated fields hedged in by dense jungle. Then came the hills rising mass upon mass, over-topped by one high peak leaping skyward like some gigantic steeple.

The reception went off perfectly, thanks to the native teacher's exertions, and Miss Gordon stood on the veranda steps beside the missionary while the pupils bellowed in harmony.

Before the hymn was concluded, however, there came a commotion among the massed singers' rear ranks and a broad-shouldered native thrust his way forward. He wore a strip of cloth about his loins and the tin lids of cigaret cans glittered in his ear-lobes. He stood out in sharp relief against the background of converts, the men in blue trousers and white singlets, the women in trailing mother-hubbard gowns.

"Upon my soul," murmured Miller, "if it isn't Ngotu! Just the man you want to meet, Miss Gordon."

Ngotu was out of breath and his wicked little eyes snapped. He addressed the missionary with vehemence.

"You want me to let you have Wonotu!" exclaimed Miller, using the island dialect. "What has he done to you?"

"Stolen and killed Tawia," grunted Ngotu. "Robbed us after we had fed him. Now you must give him to me for Tawia's blood calls for more blood."

"It is impossible," said Miller. "I do not believe it, but we shall see. Wonotu!" he called out. "Come to me, please."

Wonotu stepped up to the veranda steps. He looked mild and well-washed and intelligent, quite unlike the great Ngotu who smelled of stale coconut-oil and had no manners.

"You will speak the truth, Wonotu," ordered the missionary. "Have you been to Ngotu's village and did you kill this girl Tawia?"

Wonotu looked indignant.

"No," he answered. "I went to see my people hoping to bring back my cousin to share our happiness. For several days I struggled against the evil spirits which live there. I failed and came away broken-hearted, for my cousin is under the sway of that planter who laughs at us. I returned swiftly along the beach track."

"You see," said Miller to Ngotu. "I knew it was quite impossible."

"But have I not told you!" burst out the native. "He *killed* Tawia."

"You are mistaken," declared Miller. "Wonotu would do no such thing. Go to the village, there you may find the culprit, if culprit there is, but he is surely not here."

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"Do I lie?" shouted Ngotu. "I tell you Wonotu is the murderer and I have come to claim him. I came alone, though I could have brought fifty spears, because I thought——"

"Enough!" retorted Miller, his face setting hard. "Go your way. We speak only the truth here."

"Then I shall take him," snapped Ngotu, leaping at Wonotu's throat.

"Protect your comrade," yelled Miller, galvanized into action.

He led the rush that followed and—one man empty-handed can not for long hold out against twenty—Ngotu was soon powerless, held down face to the ground while on his back sat Wonotu triumphant.

Hastily Miller explained the situation to Miss Gordon whose expression became more sardonic than ever as she listened.

"And this is the man I shall have to deal with!" she exclaimed. "Couldn't he be placated? I want him to do me a favor——"

"My very thought," Miller assured her.

He ordered Ngotu to his feet and having stressed the fact that right is might he said:

"Ngotu, this lady has come from a far-off land to see you. She heard of that ax which you think a God-sent thing, though, of course, it is nothing of the sort——"

Ngotu glared at Miss Gordon and was rewarded by a cheerful smile which he understood better than words. He thawed a little and grumbled—

"I have no fight but with Wonotu, that is why I would not harm these children."

"She will give you a great price for it," Miller went on, "and then, instead of bowing down before bloody weapons, you can turn your thoughts——"

"The weapon of Tavale can not be sold," said Ngotu. "Neither to this woman nor to any one." Then a sudden thought came to his mind and he added: "Will you trade Wonotu for the weapon? That is a fair offer: One man's life against the life of a people."

Miller checked him hastily.

"No," he said firmly. "Let there be no talk of bartering sacred human lives. This lady will give you——"

"Nothing," said Ngotu. "All that I ask for is Wonotu—then she may have the ax."

"And what would you do to him?"

"Treat him as he treated Tawia—kill him!"

"I will not listen to such words," cried Miller. "Give thought to this lady's offer. We shall go to you in a few days' time. Have your answer ready."

Ngotu grinned at the missionary.

"Tell that woman that I have no power to trade Tavale's ax. I set you a trap—you nearly fell into it. The old men, and the old men only have a voice in the matter. If it were mine to give, tell her, she might some day get it, for she is strong with the strength of many men. Tell her that too."

His eyes rested on Wonotu and he growled:

"You ate food cooked at our fires, yet you robbed us. Very soon you shall make payment. That is plain to you, Wonotu?"

And Wonotu for the first time felt conscious of his peril. He edged closer to the missionary as if seeking protection and the latter placed a kindly hand on his shoulder.

Ngotu turned and hurried away, but instead of heading toward the hills he went down the track skirting the beach.

"Now he will take his lies to Drewitt, I suppose," snorted Miller.

"My chances of laying hands on the ax are growing more and more remote," sighed Miss Gordon. "I wish——"

"You heard what he said," Miller beamed hopefully. "If anybody is to get it I am sure you will. One has to treat these hillsmen a trifle bruskly at times, but they respect one for it. I am quite positive Ngotu bears me no ill-will for our spirited defence of this poor boy."

"And when do you think we can start?"

"Oh, very, very soon. I merely want to pick up a few threads and go among my people—they appreciate it so much. It heartens them to know that their work is appreciated."

"I'm sure it does," said Miss Gordon and Miller wondered whether she was being quite as nice as she really should be.

AN ASTUTE observer with a sharp tongue once remarked in a Vila saloon:

"Drewitt is all right, even though he seems to love the —— Kanakas. Drewitt treats 'em as if they were his own dear relatives. He's like a father to 'em. One of those soft-hearted parents who let their children work until five in the morning making artificial flowers or sewing buttonholes, and wakes up just long enough to

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kiss 'em good-by when exhaustion kills them."

Which statement was sufficiently correct to carry a sting. Drewitt, however, was not present. Undoubtedly he did work his labor to the bone, he got ten hours work a day out of them, and in the New Hebrides this is just short of the miraculous. Yet he did so without blows, threats or reprisals. He merely treated his black people as if they were human beings and not degraded brutes, and paid them wages which allowed them to rest for six months in the year. Thus he had a constant flow of fresh, healthy men and women at work in his gardens and the results he obtained astonished many a chance visitor.

The natives respected him even when he was not present, and they came to him with their troubles. The wild hillsmen who refused to work for any man trusted him and he went among them unarmed, sure of his welcome.

He had no time to be lonely, but he always looked forward to the mail boat's calls. Its stuffy smoking-saloon was his perambulating club. Here he met acquaintances and heard the latest gossip, here too he drank immoderately for two hours and went ashore cursing the fate that tied him down and made him lead a solitary if remunerative life. Then he would go back to work and forget all about his supposed misfortunes for another six weeks or so.

The day before the boat's arrival he always devoted to letter-writing, an arduous pursuit which he detested. He would barricade himself in the living-room of his bungalow where he suffered long agonies even if he was scrawling nothing more important than an order for a keg of galvanized staples. On such occasions his usually tidy hair became touseled and clung stickily to his forehead, his tongue curled up out of the corner of his mouth and he sat round-shouldered, hunched over the writing-pad as if trying to use his nose as a pen.

His house-boy had orders to admit no one. Of course there was never any one to admit, but the injunction satisfied Drewitt's conscience and left him free to interrupt his occupation for the most futile reasons. If the dogs barked, if the cook rattled a pan, if the overseer strolled by, he would dash out of the room really believing that there was some important matter that he alone could see to. On this particular Sabbath day he had been moiling for fully fifteen minutes when he heard the sound of voices raised in altercation, coming from the general direction of the kitchen.

He tried hard to concentrate on the task before him, wondering whether he should conclude a letter to his uncle with the words; "Your affecte. nephew," or, "Yours affectionately," or neither. He got as far as to write, "Yours—" but the strain became too great; he threw down his pen and bounced out of the room shouting at the top of his voice:

"Haven't I told you to keep quiet while I'm writing? D'you expect me to think while you're making such an infernal row?"

Then in the corridor he suddenly collided with Ngotu's head and sat down heavily, the breath knocked out of his body.

Said Ngotu, shaking off the house-boy who clawed at his arms—

"Tell this thing to go about its work, master. We hillsmen kill flies."

Drewitt dismissed his servant and having bullied Ngotu as a matter of form, he asked—

"What have you done now, killer of flies, that you come running to me in such a hurry?"

Ngotu was old enough to have been Drewitt's grandfather, he was still strong enough to crush him with one hand, but he grinned and answered:

"Peace, master, be kind! I come from the house of the priest-man where I was beaten and my face was rubbed in the dust."

"Your face was what?"

"Rubbed in the dust. I was humbled before women; children sat on my back and crowed their victory."

"Why? *You* could fight your way through twenty mission schools."

"It was a matter affecting Wonotu and us hillsmen. Because the priest-man joined in the fray I gave way and——"

"Wonotu? He comes from this village doesn't he? What has he done to you?"

Ngotu sitting on the floor told the story of Tawia's death, and Drewitt nodded sympathetically.

"And the priest-man listened to Wonotu's lies and believed them," sorrowfully concluded Ngotu. "Is this evil to go unpunished? Are we to be robbed, must our women be slaughtered and are we to bow down to the lies believed by the men of your breed?"

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"It is wrong," admitted Drewitt, "all wrong. I know this Wonotu. He was chased from the village some days ago, driven off by his own kin."

"What can we do?"

"Wait until the magistrate comes. Place the matter before him."

"It is too long to wait. The mother of Tawia wails and wails and her brothers polish their war-clubs."

"Keep them back. There must be no killing nor burning."

"That is why I came down to demand the culprit, but now——"

"If you sack the mission, then, as I have often said, there will come many men with guns."

"I know, we should be helpless," sighed Ngotu, thoughtfully scratching his calves. "And there is a white woman staying with the priest-man. I would not have her harmed."

"He's not married!" yelled Drewitt.

"Who knows? But I do not think so. This woman is after the ax of the great Tavale."

"Another one," grunted Drewitt.

"She will go away empty-handed, but each time it becomes more difficult. The young men hear of the offers that are made. They go to their elders and whine, saying:

" 'For so much money we could all buy tobacco and clothes. There are no more wars now, let us part with the ax. Tavale must be dead for he is never seen, nor are our prayers answered.'

"They have no wisdom, these young men. And it is a struggle always a little more bitter. Yet *you* know what would happen should we part with the ax."

"I know," gravely admitted Drewitt.

"What can an old man do? This woman is to come among us in a few days and she will shout out the price she offers for every one to hear."

All at once Drewitt's countenance relaxed. He chuckled and Ngotu exclaimed—

"You laugh at our peril!"

"I do not. Listen to me——"

And when Drewitt stopped speaking Ngotu was chuckling also.

"I knew that your face was but a mask concealing your knowledge," he declared, restored at last to good humor.

"Now, be on your way," ordered Drewitt. "And there must be *no* raids. Wait for the magistrate."

Ngotu's grunt reached Drewitt from the doorway, and the latter turned once more to his writing-pad, sighing wearily.

AT DAWN the mail boat anchored off Erumboma and Drewitt went out in his launch shouting greetings while he was still a quarter of a mile away. As soon as he set foot on the deck the purser fell upon him and dragged him into his cabin.

"I want a drink," protested Drewitt.

"You'll want several when I tell you the awful news," retorted the purser.

"Not another war just yet!"

"No. Worse'n that. We have a visitor for you."

"Visitor—who's come to this forsaken island?"

"A sweet little thing by the name of Sigfried Reissler. He's listed as a collector."

"These birds," grumbled Drewitt, "seem to think that I run a hotel. One fellow kicked because I didn't keep cows—wanted fresh milk in his coffee. I said to him—but I told you that one about a year ago. Man grows rusty out here; repeats himself."

"Reissler's not very popular with us," the purser went on. "Too much of the 'when I was in Timbuctoo' stuff. Thought I'd warn you. You don't have to put him up. We could——"

"Oh, let him come. There's a she-collector barging round over at the padre's. Haven't met her. I suppose I can stand this globe-trotter for a few weeks. You'll be back when?"

"Short run this time. Ought to call in about two weeks. We're only going as far as Vila."

"By that time I'll have told this fellow all my jokes and he'll be ready to go. Don't worry, he'll go empty-handed. And by the way, when you reach Vila just tell Galton we need a good magistrate down here for a few days, will you?"

"Sure. Well, I thought I'd let you know what to expect. Now come and have a drink and meet Reissler."

They found the latter saying good-by in the saloon to the numerous 'friends' he had made on the trip.

"So this is Mr. Drewitt," he exclaimed, much as a teacher greets young charges at the beginning of term. "I am certainly glad to see that I am not going to shtay with some drunken ruffian."

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"I thank you," said Drewitt politely. "Glad to have you stay with me. Now let's drink."

Reissler was very jolly. He drank peppermint cordial and talked of his adventures in Basutoland.

"You must have an exciting life, you collectors," commented a Malikolo planter who was going back to his estate to be poisoned by a Malay cook.

"Ve do," admitted Reissler. "And when there is competition it is still more exciting yet. There was a lady collector at Noumea, and she was after this ax also. But," he laughed, "she is not so dangerous. Py golly, she went and over-slept the day the boat sailed!"

"How nice for you," some one remarked.

"You bet," agreed Reissler. "Now I have the field to myself and with the kind help of our friend——"

"I may as well tell you that the lady's been on the island for the last couple of days," Drewitt informed him. "She traveled up from Noumea with the missionary."

"What?" squealed Reissler. "She—but it is impossible! Do not go pulling my leg."

"I wouldn't," declared Drewitt. "She's here all right."

"But I am wasting time. Ve must go ashore at once."

"If you don't mind waiting until I finish this whisky I'll join you," agreed Drewitt.

Reissler was reduced to a state of tearful anxiety. He insisted upon the urgency of his business, demanded what he called 'an honest deal,' and at last he went out on deck where he gazed longingly at the hills of Erumboma until Drewitt condescended to leave his friends.

"It is still early," said Reissler as he waddled ashore. "I will hire from you guides and horses—or perhaps you will escort me, and when the business is over——"

By this time Drewitt wished that he had taken the purser's advice. He had no intention of being hurried and badgered so he said placidly:

"Suppose you wait until tomorrow? You must need a rest."

"I do not! No, no!" Reissler reassured him. "And there is this woman. She tricked me." He really thought himself wronged. "You will let me have horses today, please. I vill pay handsomely."

Without comment Drewitt led the way to his house and ushered his guest into the one spare-room.

Reissler's face when he was left alone was apoplectic with anger. Everything had apparently gone wrong. That woman had gained a day's start on him and she was not out of reach. Noisily he unpacked his handbag and then rattled a hair-brush against a chair-back, to give the impression that he was still busy, while he stood by the door and listened to Drewitt talking with his overseer. He cursed softly when he heard Drewitt say:

"Have a couple of horses saddled tomorrow at seven, and tell Paul to be ready to take this gentleman inland—same as we did for the last one, you know, the man who went about with a couple of rifles slung across his back. They'll need three days' food——"

Reissler slipped a blunt-nosed revolver into his pocket and went into the living-room. His knees shook with terror, his eyes were glassy, but he was accustomed to this state of partial collapse before action and refused to give way. Moreover, he was desperate. The idea of being beaten by a woman, and that woman Miss Gordon, galled him as nothing had ever done before.

He found Drewitt sitting with his feet on the table, draining a glass of Vichy water.

"Look, my young friend," he said pleasantly, "you will order those horses for me today like a good boy."

"Nope," answered Drewitt, equally cheerful. "I won't. I've fixed everything for tomorrow at seven in the morning. In the first place it wouldn't be hospitable to let you go so soon——"

"Hospitable!" grunted Reissler.

"And then, you know, *place aux dames.* This Miss Gordon beat you here by forty-eight hours, more or less. She's entitled to try her luck first."

"You think that, so help you?" asked Reissler, licking his dry lips.

"Sure I do. The chances are she'll fail as they all do, then it'll be your turn."

"I will not wait,"declared Reissler. "I beg you to let me have this guide today. It is a business proposition and I wish to be friendly, but I have come too far to take chances."

Drewitt waved his glass of water at his guest and changed the topic under discussion.

"Nothing like this stuff to set a man on his feet," he remarked. "Ever tried it?"

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Reissler edged closer to the table and the look on his face caused Drewitt to bring his feet to the floor with a bang.

"Sit quiet," snapped Reissler. "You see my pocket? Yes, that is a gun. You move and I shoot."

"You don't say," remarked Drewitt, sitting quite still. "What's the idea?"

"Py golly, you make a fool out of Reissler, no. You tell your people to have those horses brought around at once and this man Paul too."

"So you were listening."

"I should think so. When I am up against bad shports like you I keep my ears open. Now call that fellow you gave orders to. Quick! And if you say one wrong word I put a bullet inside of you, py golly!"

Drewitt had lived long enough to realize that this red, palsied, fat man was in grim earnest, that he would not hesitate to carry out his threat. He looked from the bulging coat-pocket to the bulging, wide-open eyes and called for his servant.

He issued orders quite calmly and when the house-boy left the room he asked—

"Will that suit you?"

Reissler grunted inarticulately.

"Hope it does," laughed Drewitt. "And don't forget that I'm coming after you. When we meet you *may* be sorry."

"That is unavoidable," admitted Reissler. "But you will not follow me for some time. Get up and lead the way to your own room."

He trussed and gagged Drewitt clumsily but effectively with strips torn from sheets. When this was done to his satisfaction he murmured—

"Now where am I going to put you?"

He was so incensed when Drewitt winked at him that he bent down and twitched the nose jutting out above the gag.

"You think it funny," he growled. "Me too. Ha, ha!"

He bundled his captive into a black closet smelling of moldy leather and carefully locked the door, taking the key with him.

Twenty minutes later the servant reappeared followed by Paul, the guide, a coal-black islander wearing gum-boots and little else.

"Your master is not well," explained Reissler. "He lies down with a headache—too much drink. He does not wish to be disturbed again today. Let us go."

As they rode away from the house they met two Kanakas bearing between them a heavy load wrapped in palm-leaves and bound with vines.

"Hillsmen," explained Paul. "Come for master."

"Are they? Tell them to get out of my way. Ve are in a great hurry," declared Reissler.

He urged his horse forward and the natives growled as they jumped aside.

"They have not the politeness to move," complained Reissler. "Do they never give way to white men here?"

"Master always speak 'good morning,'" answered Paul, "so they stop all same for you."

"Is that all! Vell, make haste."

They jogged across open fields beneath a blinding noontide sun, then on through dense forest and up the first gentle slope. That night they halted at the foot of the hills in a gorge where a brook whispered in the stillness.

WITH natives Reissler had a way all his own. To him "the white man's burden" was a raised, clenched fist or, because his fist was podgy and soft, the butt end of a gun. The method had served him well among Levantines and slave-driven Hereros, and the practise had become second nature.

He looked upon his guide as just "another —— nigger," a thing without a soul or a stomach. This proved disastrous.

At eleven o'clock on the second day of their journey through the hills they halted by the side of a stream where Paul fried corned-beef hash and baked johnny-cakes in the ashes. Reissler stood behind him issuing unnecessary directions and when the food was ready he wolfed it all, washing it down with rum and water.

Paul squatting by the fire watched the greasy lips close over the last crumb and then quietly proceeded to make more for himself.

The white man had enjoyed the food so much that he had left none for the cook! It was a subtle compliment; Paul appreciated it but he was hungry. He threw fresh twigs on the fire and mixed dough with a long forefinger.

"What the —— are you waiting for?" demanded Reissler, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"*Kiki*," explained Paul, crouching low as he blew on the embers. "Hungry——"

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"Get up and tighten those girths," ordered Reissler. "I am in a —— of a hurry. I have told you that often enough."

"Mebbe, mebbe." Paul busied himself opening a can of beef. "You eat, me eat."

"Eat!" indignantly exclaimed Reissler. "You can feed later on. Py golly, you black ——, I tell you tighten those girths."

Paul looked up into the red, sweating face and explained quite gently that their goal lay just beyond the next high ridge, a matter of only another two hours' steady riding. Also, he said, it was an order of Mr. Drewitt's that no man should work on an empty belly.

Thereupon he was kicked a trifle too hard for his immediate comfort just beneath the ribs. He rolled over among the pans feeling very sick.

Reissler, frightened by his own temerity, became doubly violent and, having drawn his gun, kicked the native to his feet.

"Now, py golly," he shouted, "you do what I say, yes!"

Paul obeyed. He repacked the pans and the food, he slipped the bits back into the horses' mouths, he tightened the girths while Reissler nagged and nagged.

Hate blinded the native, but he remembered Drewitt and quelled the wild passion within him. He looked from the towering hills, barren and hard, from the dazzling sun in the blue sky, down to the whining man in front of him and he vaguely felt how puny they both were —— squealing rats wedged in a crevice in the floor of the earth, fighting for food. The thought amused him, he laughed and again Reissler struck him.

This time Paul decided that he had suffered more than enough. He wanted to murder his tormentor but he was not quite sure whether Drewitt would understand, so he came to the conclusion that he had best go and find out. He waited until Reissler had one foot in the stirrup then he vaulted onto his horse's back and fled.

"Hi!" yelled Reissler. "You come back!"

Paul was across the ford before Reissler could bring his gun to bear. The shots missed their mark but produced unexpected results. Reissler's steed appalled by the detonations reared up, shook itself once and, riderless, dashed away in pursuit of its mate.

Reissler was left alone in the valley—a stout, disheveled figure, whose gutter-bred oaths sounded weak and filthy in the bright stillness. But Reissler though he was part coward, part rogue, and wholly unscrupulous possessed one quality, sometimes called tenacity, sometimes labeled guts. He never knew when he was beaten, never turned back even though he knew that he must go through hell to attain his purpose. He was afraid of thunder and lightning, death by drowning and railway smashes, break-bone fever and motor cars, but when he was on the trail he never paused until success crowned his efforts.

His money-belt was still in place beneath his red flannel cummerbund, he still had his revolver and a pocket-full of cartridges. When he saw Paul disappear out of sight he turned without a second's hesitation and went plodding down the track.

In his mind there was no place for doubt as to the result of his undertaking; he was too fully occupied hauling his heavy body up the precipitous slope. Great height made him dizzy and toward the summit, when the path became a crumbling ledge overhanging a blue chasm, he was obliged to turn his face to the wall of rock and work his way along sidewise, clinging like a fly to the mountain-side.

From the crest, which was the island's watershed, he discovered new horizons. Beneath him the hills were less rugged, their sides less barren, and far away through a gap he caught sight of the sea, a V-shaped patch shining like polished steel.

He crowed aloud.

"You are doing fine," he told himself. "Only make haste—you don't want Drewitt butting in."

At his feet in a saucer-like depression he caught sight of a single column of smoke rising up into the stagnant air from beneath a green carpet of trees.

"Py golly," he said, "and there is the village. Nice place!"

He reached level ground and hurried along, head down, keeping his eyes on the overgrown track winding now between walls of jungle. He disliked the sudden twists and bends, always expecting some figure to leap out at him, and he kept his hand on the gun in his pocket.

"I wish," he mumbled, "I wish——"

Then he lumbered into the midst of a group of hillsmen whose bone-tipped spears were leveled at his chest. They appeared all around him and he awoke to the realization

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that they did not seem as friendly as they might have been.

Squat, broad-shouldered, with deep chests and bulging thigh muscles, they were quite unlike the coastal tribes with which Reissler had come in contact. Their faces were coarse; their jaws were huge yet their chins receded, their noses were broad, flattened out on their faces, and in many cases the pierced septums hung down loosely on the thick upper lips. Their beady eyes were overshadowed by bulging ridges and the slope of their foreheads was accentuated by mops of matted, filthy hair.

"Well, boys," said Reissler, wondering whether to shoot or not, "who is the big chief?"

"Where you belong?" demanded one Kanaka, prodding him with the head of his spear.

"Ouch! Don't do that or I'll——"

"Where you belong?"

"I come from Mr. Drewitt. You savvy Drewitt?" Reissler was inspired to say.

This seemed to relieve the tension. The warriors chattered among themselves and their spokesman finally ordered Reissler to accompany them. The order was issued gruffly and was accompanied by a thrust in the small of the back.

Such rough treatment annoyed Reissler so much that he forgot his growing anxiety.

"Py golly," he exclaimed, "what do you mean by so much shoving? And where do you want me to go? Tell me that before I move!"

He started to drag his revolver from his coat-pocket when without any warning he was briskly rapped over the head, tripped up and carried face downward along the track by four stalwart Kanakas. Thus he missed a great deal of jungle scenery and had a close view of the tropical weeds overrunning the path. But he was not a botanist. Moreover blood was dripping from the wound in his scalp; it was trickling down over his cheeks and around his neck onto his chest.

He squealed all the way to the village and was still squealing when he was dropped in the sunlit clearing before the cooking-house at Ngotu's feet. The impact silenced him for a few seconds and when he regained the power of speech he found it difficult to conduct the negotiations with his customary heartiness.

He rolled over, sat up and glared at Ngotu who squatted with his back against a wooden post smoking a short clay-pipe.

"I shall report—" began Reissler.

"What you want?" demanded Ngotu.

"I shall report——"

Ngotu turned from him in disgust.

"Ho!" he called to the warriors. "Who is this spitting man and why was he hit?"

"We spied him as he came down from the hills, alone and on foot. When we ordered him to come with us he tried to shoot. So Karua struck him over the head. He says that he comes from the house of that white man who is your friend."

Ngotu shook his head. He could not believe that Drewitt would let a fellow white man travel through the hills without food or escort. This man must be lying. No one had ever seen him before; he was no doubt a spy sent, perhaps, by the missionary.

And at the moment the tribe wanted no interference with its private affairs. The men and the women had left the fields, there were great stacks of food gathered by the ovens, the elders were praying to the spirits of the dead far away in the bush—and this white man must come stumbling in upon them!

"Make talk," ordered Ngotu, pointing the stem of his pipe at Reissler.

"Ax," explained the latter, trying hard to be cheerful. "Trade it. Buy it for plenty much money."

He held out silver in the palm of his hand.

"Drewitt savvy you come?" suspiciously asked Ngotu.

"Yes—of course. Make trade now? Quick, savvy? Much money for trade. Then you send guide—man show the way to mission station."

Ngotu's eyes blazed. The man was an imposter. Why should he go to the mission if he were a friend of Drewitt's.

He shouted to his people:

"This one lies. He offers money for the ax of Tavale. And you know that there is yet work for that ax to do! Take this one—do not kill him. His time will come later, and at the feast we shall decide his fate as we did in the days of my youth—we shall test him. If he speaks the truth he will not die and he may go free."

Reissler fired twice from his pocket. A boy, hit in the pit of the stomach, collapsed screaming, then the throng closed in and tore down the white man, binding him tight with thongs.

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When it was done Ngotu stood looking down at the prisoner, still puffing slowly at his clay pipe.

"I came to trade," whined Reissler through puffy lips.

"And you die," answered Ngotu. "Ax finish you."

A FAMOUS neurologist once rashly declared at a Paris clinic that all forms of hysteria are simulated. What grounds he may have had for this assertion are best known to himself. After spending forty-eight hours at the mission station on Erumboma, Miss Gordon found herself reduced to a state verging upon "tremor and collapse" which was in no way assumed nor pleasurable.

Opposition to her plans she knew and understood, hatred and malice, violence even, she could tolerate, but passive resistance plus benign though despotic paternalism she could not cope with at all. The combination left her helpless, very warm, and for the first time in her life wishing that she were married—the mother of innumerable children who made a gray drudge of her.

Instead she was cooped up within the limits of the mission grounds and never did she stray a yard from the —— garden facing the veranda but Miller dashed after her. His method of approach never varied——

He feared for her safety, the islanders were barbaric, he would be only too, too pleased to go anywhere with her, but would she please, please inform him of her wishes. He was, he said, entirely at her service.

When she informed him that her dearest and only wish was to go inland at once, he looked rather pained and gently reminded her that he had been away for one month, one long month. Of course, if she insisted—he smiled ruefully—he would drop everything and go, but really the place had fallen off just a little, lost its fine keen edge. He was responsible for the salvation of *so* many souls! He was sure she understood—and perhaps, because of the many details he had to attend to, she would not mind waiting just one or two days longer.

"But Reissler arrived yesterday," she persisted.

"Reissler? Reissler?" he murmured vaguely, his eyes straying toward a group of boys cleaning harness. "Ah, of course, the scoundrel! Yes, indeed—Reissler."

"He reached Erumboma yesterday—Monday," Miss Gordon enunciated very clearly. "I am rather anxious to have this sacred ax in my possession before he has a chance to bid for it."

"The sacred ax," repeated Miller. "I know, yes— Don't those boys work with a *will?* And there is Wonotu soaping the very bridle you are going to use on our little jaunt. Poor boy he has been grossly slandered!"

"And do you think that by tomorrow you will be free? If not I could go on by myself. It would not be the first time that——"

Miller's soul swiftly returned from its soarings to deal with matters mundane.

"Let you go alone? My dear lady! How could I think of such a thing? I want you really to enjoy your stay amongst us. There is a splendid view from the top of Pine Hill—at least I call it Pine Hill, the native name is *Soloi Kerkeri,* the Catcher of Light—on a clear day one can see Anaiteum, just a speck on the horizon. It gives one a comforting sense of companionship when one is lonely. I will gladly show you the way, the track is——"

"That is to say, you will be ready to leave tomorrow—Wednesday?"

"Wednesday?" he pondered gravely, his eyes again vague. "I wonder—I should go through the gardens and then take the class on the geography of the Bible Lands. So much to do! But if you really insist, though I'm sure this Mr.—Mr. Reissler won't start for several days yet, of course I shall be delighted to place myself unreservedly at your disposal. It is so jolly having you here—showing my girls how to use needle and thread and all that. I shall be sorry to see you go, but when you do I know that you will have the weapon.

"And now if you don't mind—may I leave you for a little while? A little clerical work—tedious but essential for the proper running of my little place. Don't explore the vicinage without an escort, will you? I must run. Tea is at half-past four. You will find my little library just off the living-room—a few good books, rare friends! Ta-ta!"

Little! Little! Little! So jolly! A bother! Delighted! The words dinned in Miss Gordon's brain. They infuriated her so much that she went down the neat path bordered with white-washed stones and

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kicked hard at the gravel, her scuffling feet exposing the earth in long unsightly scars. For the moment she was ten years old and very primitive. By tea time she was again forty-six, civilized and had a headache.

"I'm going to leave this place tomorrow morning if I have to go on foot," she told herself later as she dressed for dinner.

She was so exasperated that she dragged back her rather nice hair and gathered it in one tight wad, a bun, on top of her head. She wore her heaviest boots and a blouse she hated with short sleeves that left exposed her sharp, red elbows. Her gray dress, she knew, was hitched up in front and hung down too far at the back. Her sun-baked face was shiny; she wanted it to be shiny, she wanted to be hideous. So far as Nature would allow her to go she succeeded in her endeavor. A more formidable, unprepossessing and ill-dressed woman never marched into a dining-room however remote from civilization.

Miller had eyes that could see quite clearly when the occasion demanded. When the gaunt apparition came stalking toward him he was so taken aback that for a second he was speechless. When at last he spoke he showed absolutely no tact.

"Aren't you feeling very well?" he inquired anxiously, peering at her.

She gaped at him, her lips painfully imitating a smile. She wanted to strangle him, instead she answered primly—

"I am quite well, thank you."

He thought her very brave to show such control over pain and his admiration for her increased.

When he was not trying to thrust quinin upon her he talked blithely of things that should have interested her but did not. He spoke about settlement work in East London and crèches and the Present Age of Unbelief. But most of the time he devoted to quinin.

"I'm sure it would do you good," he said. "I have the nicest tablets. The coating is so smooth one can swallow them without water. It's so nasty having them stick in one's throat. They sometimes stick in mine and of course a lady's—ah—throat is so much— But won't you try them? They are quite handy; no trouble at all."

"No, thank you," feebly protested Miss Gordon. "I don't *want* quinin. I do not want quinin."

"Well, well," Miller smiled paternally. "At all events we must keep you here a few days more until you are *quite* fit."

She went to bed early, neither of them having mentioned axes, hills or Kanakas.

But she could not sleep. One minute she wanted to laugh at her own helplessness, the next she was wishing she were a man with at least the privilege of swearing.

"What he's suffering from," she told herself at about midnight, "is mental housemaid's knee. He has to think down to my level. His middle name should be Humility. The arrogance of it! Trying to reform sin—that's me—by grovelling at my feet."

She went to the open window and rested her arms on the sill while she glared out at the starlit night.

A breeze sighed through the tree-tops and the surf muttered at the bar, otherwise Erumboma slept. When her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness she saw the black mass of the chapel and the less bulky outlines of the huts, their thatched roofs faintly glimmering as they reflected the light of the stars.

"First it was Reissler," she grumbled, "who couldn't get rid of me quick enough. Now it's this Miller person who *will* fuss like an old hen. I wish— What on earth is that?"

Out of the blackness beyond the huts a string of torches had suddenly appeared. She counted seven of them.

"Students, I suppose," she said to herself. "Been out touring Erumboma's Great White Way. I wish I could— Something *is* happening," she concluded abruptly, for the torches had suddenly halted and clustered about one hut.

The sound of voices drifted through the night; angry, harsh voices, followed by a scream, loud, clear and frightened.

It broke off as if muffled and the torches went out. For a second there was a deathlike stillness, then came a confused sound of yelling, a pounding of running feet, lights appeared at windows.

"Cally Gordon get dressed," she told herself. "This may be the customary Tuesday night program, but I'm inclined to doubt it."

Miller was awake and shouting as he plunged into his clothes. She heard him chattering to a frantic group of pupils huddled outside on the veranda. When, some minutes later, she hurried from her room

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she found Miller flinging orders at his trembling servants. He was transfigured. His nebulous quality had vanished and he was black-eyed with indignation.

As she watched him growing each minute more excited, Miss Gordon found her own tolerant frame of mind reasserting itself.

"Would you mind telling me what has happened?" she inquired, looking at him quite calmly.

It was Miller's turn to stare at her in dumb exasperation. He was quite polite, however, when he spoke.

"I am sorry to say," he declared, "that Wonotu has been kidnapped. He was snatched from his hut and dragged away——"

"That's the man who is said to have murdered——"

"It is nonsensical! Wonotu was—is one of my ablest pupils. I am going after him at once."

"Going after him where?"

"In the hills," Miller labored to answer with martyr-like calm. "This can only be the work of Ngotu. I shall not be gone long. My house is yours. I have given orders——"

"I am going with you," Miss Gordon said firmly.

"But I am responsible for your safety," wailed Miller. "Won't you wait? Oh, you must wait!"

"Not one minute. I'm going with you. I insist."

"The tracks at night are so dangerous, and the people may be hostile! I don't know how they will receive me. A little later——"

"Will you tell your man to saddle a horse for me," demanded Miss Gordon. "I am going on my own responsibility. You are absolved."

He allowed himself to be coerced because he was in too much of a hurry to stop and argue. He no longer cared what happened to this interfering woman who trampled upon his kindness.

When they went out to get mounted Miss Gordon asked—

"By the way, do you carry a gun?"

"Gun?" snorted Miller. "No, naturally not."

"My mistake," murmured Miss Gordon, jamming a clip of cartridges into her automatic.

NGOTU had said—

"Be swift!"

And the raiders obeyed him. They scorned the track that wound over easy passes and along valley bottoms; they breasted the highest hills traveling over the roughest ground at a steady, even pace—and with them went Wonotu, the slayer of Tawia.

Once in the gray vagueness before dawn he tried to escape, leaping from boulder to boulder toward a clump of bushes. A club hurled through the air smashed his shoulder to pulp and as he fell his left ankle caught between two stones. It snapped like rotten wood and he screeched with pain until his pursuers coming upon him closed his mouth with blows.

"Let him live," said the leader. "His soul belongs to Tawia's kin. He is theirs to kill."

So they dragged him over the broken ground and he left a trail of blood from hill-top to hill-top until an hour after daybreak they reached the village and threw the groaning man at Ngotu's feet.

The chief rolled him over with his foot and called out—

"Carry out that white man that he may learn his lesson!"

"Do we kill him today?" chorused the people.

"No," said Ngotu, "for if he were slain the men of his race would come and twenty of us would die."

"But he killed Mbuto!"

"Is he worth a score of lives?"

But the throng shouted down Ngotu and the throng's word was law.

They hauled Reissler from the hut where he had been thrown the day before and he quivered at the sight of Wonotu's mangled body. They flung him in the shade of the cooking-house, propping him up that he might witness the punishment of Wonotu.

For a space an expectant hush settled over the village, then to the sound of drums the elders filed out of the bush bearing an ax so big and so heavy that no one of them could lift it.

Reissler whimpered when he saw the great polished head of green jade and the shaft all wrought with mother-of-pearl. There was the ax—and he was powerless, helpless, about to die. His eyes bulged when he saw a brawny native, Tawia's father, bow to the weapon and with tremendous effort pick it

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up. The mob was roaring, open mouthed with delight, stamping its feet in time with the rhythm of the drums and on the ground Wonotu writhed and hid his face in the dust.

The ax whirled through the air—a flashing green arc—and Wonotu's head seemed to leap away from the trunk as a jet of blood spurted out into the sun-baked earth.

Reissler screamed when he saw a group of men come toward him. He screamed as they caught him and pulled him out beside the corpse. As he squirmed his shirt ripped open and a thin stream of gold pieces trickled from his loosened money-belt.

On his back with the sun in his eyes he watched while his executioner slowly raised the ax to his shoulder. The stained round head went up and out of sight as the man reached the top of his swing. Reissler's shrieks were drowned by the mighty clamor. He waited for the end rolling from side to side as Wonotu had done.

He waited—but the end did not come.

A bullet smashed the Kanaka's wrist and the great weapon fell to the ground behind him. Miss Gordon burst through the astonished ranks and drew up, smiling bleakly as she looked at Reissler who had fainted. Behind her lumbered Miller sawing at his horse's mouth.

The hillsmen's stupor gave way to flaming hate; Ngotu tried to intervene but he was brushed aside.

"Keep back," shouted Miller, rising in his stirrups. "You shall be punished for this!"

Miss Gordon wasted no words. She rode straight at the mob, rode through it, wheeled and went back at it again. A spear tore off her sun-helmet and the thrower died with a bullet between his eyes.

She tried to reach Miller who was being driven back against the huts, but the yelling hillsmen clawed at her bridle and a blow on the knee made her sick and giddy.

"Brutes!" she heard herself saying. "Nice situation for a lady to be in!"

She reached Miller's side, cutting in between him and his assailants, and side by side they plunged through the crowd. Somehow they escaped from the ring of huts, but the Kanakas poured out behind them.

Miller's horse went lame, stumbled on for a few steps and collapsed with the broken tip of a spear in its near shoulder.

"Jump up behind," ordered Miss Gordon.

Miller hesitated though the swarm of natives was not fifty yards away.

"Don't forget Reissler," he urged. "I can't leave him like——"

Then his mouth opened and let out a most unchristian yell. Coming through a break in the trees, riding like the wind came Drewitt a gun in each hand. Behind him galloped three of his men with rifles across their saddle-trees.

"Where's Reissler?" he yelled as he swept by.

"Village," answered Miss Gordon. "They've got him——"

"Come on!"

Before the thundering hooves the natives broke and fled, bolting across the fields toward the shelter of the jungle. They knew Drewitt all too well, remembering vividly his early days on the island when he had cured them of raiding his plantation, and they dropped their weapons that their flight might not be checked.

"Well," said Miss Gordon. "You're a handy person to have on an island."

Drewitt grinned widely and jerked his head at the village.

"Reissler still alive?" he asked.

"Don't know. Don't suppose so. They had him tied up like a spring chicken."

"Let's go. If that old —— Ngotu has butchered him there will be the very deuce to pay."

But Ngotu had not butchered the captive. They found him sitting on Reissler's chest smoking his short clay-pipe.

"Oh, master," he said when Drewitt dismounted beside him. "I am your slave. Tavale did not want this man's life and when that awful woman scattered my people I sat upon him to save him from spear thrusts. Have I done well?"

"You have," admitted Drewitt. "You are forgiven—but who are the dead?"

"Wonotu—" began the chief.

Miller reached them in time to hear the last word and he burst into loud lamentations demanding that Ngotu be held for the murder of his pupil.

"You're wrong, padre," declared Drewitt. "Wonotu was a bad egg. I knew him. The day before the girl was murdered he came over to my place drunk and had to be chased away. He made straight for the hills when he left."

Miller's face was wrathful.

"But they should have made a complaint—" he began.

"They did. Ngotu did. You wouldn't

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even listen to him. They're not accustomed to the law's delays. They're not civilized enough. They want action."

"And they seem to get it," put in Miss Gordon, who was on her knees cutting the thongs binding Reissler. "Won't they be coming back for more——"

"I doubt it," said Drewitt. "I've had to deal with them once or twice before." He turned to Ngotu and added in the local tongue: "But for all this fighting there must be some punishment. This woman came to Erumboma to purchase that great ax lying there."

"I am your slave," mumbled Ngotu, gazing at the sky.

"Then give it to her—and for nothing."

"It is yours to give, master."

Miller unable to believe his ears translated the conversation for the benefit of Miss Gordon.

For once in her life she was too surprized to keep her mouth shut.

"Do you mean to tell me that he is going to give me—" she stammered.

"Yes," said Drewitt, "and if you don't mind we'll strap it on your horse before the Kanakas came crawling back. The women are hiding in the huts. Just at present they won't say anything but I don't know about the men—they might object to Ngotu's generosity."

Reissler, sitting up, was croaking in a weak voice—

"Py golly, py golly!"

"Sorry," said Miss Gordon, "you lose."

"I don't care," wheezed Reissler. "You saved my life, yes. You may have the ax. It is nothing. Cheap trifle. Six months ago I picked up the last gold bell in Karen. *That* was a find! I can afford to lose sometimes—to ladies."

So the ax left the hills that day and collectors came no more to Erumboma.

Before they parted Miss Gordon said to Drewitt:

"I really can't thank you enough. First you pulled us out of a tight corner, and then you made the chief give me the ax! I'll see you are given credit."

"Very kind of you," smiled Drewitt, "but I'd much rather be left out of it. I'm glad you've got this ax. I may be able to get some work out of these people now. They'll have to buy knives and they'll need money."

He turned to Reissler and added:

"Come on, my great collector, you've had the licking I was going to give you. We'll call it a day. Think I can trust you until the boat calls?"

"My dear friend!" spluttered Reissler. "I promise—and then, there is my bag, you know."

They parted and Reissler on the way down to the coast laughed heartily at all his host's time-worn jokes.

TWO days later the mission schooner bore Miss Gordon and her trophy to Nouméa on the first stage of her homeward journey. Reissler in due course departed and Erumboma sank back into sunlit stillness.

Then Ngotu wandered out of his hills with two young men at his heels and found Drewitt playing solitaire on the veranda of his bungalow.

"It is as you said," grinned Ngotu.

"Just as I said, killer of flies. These people can not tell the true from the false. They are happy now and will trouble you no more. What did the woman get?"

"An old thing," laughed Ngotu. "A chopper used for felling trees before the days when you sold us knives made of iron."

"Quite good enough. They knew how to work in the old days. So it goes! Well, my boy will show you where it is. It lies in the shed by the water-tank."

"Master," grunted the old chief, "if there were more men of your breed——"

"You'd be dancing Maypole dances in art jumpers when you weren't working twelve hours a day," snapped Drewitt in English. "Now get out, you old heathen. *Avanti!*"

And Ngotu went back to his village in triumph, his young men bearing on their shoulders a heavy bundle wrapped in palm-leaves, bound with vines; it contained the sacred ax sent down by the great Tavale for the tribe's protection. Drewitt had guarded it against the swooping vultures.

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The Master's Touch

by James K. Waterman

"RIGHT about here, six years ago, is where we lost Dave Rucker," observed Captain Gardner to his mate, Mr. Jennings. "He was my first mate at the time an', to give him his due, one of the greatest whaleman that ever churned a lance in the heart of a whale. But he left me like that."

Captain Gardner snapped his fingers and, raising his glasses, scanned the shore of the verdant island of Flores, one of the Azores, off which the whaling-bark *Jonathan Horn* was now sailing, under shortened canvas.

"What happened to him?" asked the mate interestedly, turning his gaze away from the green vineyards on the hill slopes, buttoned here and there with tiny, white-washed cottages, and facing the skipper. "Did he get drowned?"

"Not that anybody knowed of," responded Captain Gardner, lowering his glasses, his broad, red face breaking into a grin. "I sent him ashore one night on the same errand you're goin' tonight, an' he never came back."

"Deserted, eh!" pondered Mr. Jennings. " 'Tisn't often you hear of a mate doin' that."

His eyes questioned the skipper.

"No. You don't. But Dave was mighty sore at me at the time. We'd had a hot argument over a matter of whalin' teckneek, Dave contending that it was possible for an officer after he got fast to a whale to unjoint his flukes with the boat-spade so the whale couldn't navigate no more. An' I told Dave that it not only wasn't possible but that nobody but a —— fool would try it, for it meant certain death to the officer, and a stove-in boat as well. An' so one word led to another till we mighty nigh come to blows over it. We was both hot-tempered in them days but I didn't think Dave would take it so much to heart, though I'll admit I said a good deal more than I oughter. I felt bad about it afterward, as we generally do, when it's too late; for Dave was a most likable cuss an', as I said before, a masterhand at the business. Put him in the middle of a pod o' whales an' he'd have his whale killed an' fast to another generally before the other officers had theirs in a position to lance. I never saw his like, an' him only about thirty years old at that."

Captain Gardner sighed and walking to the skylight looked down at the clock.

"Stand by to tack ship, Mr. Jennings!" he said. "I don't want to get in too close to the land till after dark. Then we'll send a coupla boats ashore for the five men we was short when we left New Bedford. Hard down your wheel!" This to the helmsman.

The men braced round the yards, and when the *Jonathan Horn* was straightened out on the other tack Mr. Jennings reverted to the mysterious disappearance of the former mate.

"Did you ever hear tell what become of him?" he asked the skipper.

"Yes, but I dunno how much truth there was in it. I heard that he'd shipped boatheader on an Aberdeen whaler an' three or four years later 'twas rumored he was running a whalin' station on one of these islands somewhere. But he ain't been on no New Bedford whaler since or I'd heard of it. But good luck to him, wherever he is. I don't hold no hard feelings against him an' I'd like the chance to tell him so."

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AT NIGHTFALL the ship ran close in shore and backed her main yards, and two boats were made ready to lower. Five new pairs of sea-boots were placed in the larboard boat in charge of the mate.

"Be as expeditious as possible, Mr. Jennings," advised the skipper. "That Portugee gunboat *Rapido* may be cruising about somewhere, an' if we're caught enticing any of his Majesty's subjects that's of military age we're in for a peck o' trouble. So don't waste no time. You'll find plenty of men on the beach there waitin' for you. They savvy what we're here for, an' they'd rather go whalin' with us than down to the West Coast a-shoulderin' a musket for the king, any day. Just set a pair o' boots on the beach an' let the aspirants fight for 'em. A process of elimination, ye know. The man that shows gumption enough to win a pair o' boots under them circumstances has the makin's of a good whaleman. All ready your boats? Lower away handsomely, then."

The boats had hardly grounded on the sandy beach when the whalemen were surrounded by a motley crowd of Flores men, their features barely distinguishable in the starlight, all chattering excitedly like a shipload of monkeys. Whereupon the mate placed a pair of boots on the sand, the whalers guffawing delightedly as the contenders hurled themselves on the coveted prize like a football team on to the pigskin.

Finally one strapping young fellow leaped from the vortex of arms and legs waving the boots triumphantly and was taken in charge by the second mate, who led him to the boat. Three more pairs were won in a similar manner, and the last pair put up. Realizing that this was their only chance the islanders fought in deadly earnest, squealing, clawing, kicking; the fine white sand flying in showers about them.

Suddenly from out the surrounding gloom shot the long figure of a man who precipitated himself into the mêlée and was promptly engulfed, the contestants billowing over him like a carpet under which a man is crawling. He shot up from the writhing mass, a minute later, stripped of his outside clothing, but hugging the boots to his breast as he made a dash for the waist boat.

As he was evidently not one of their crowd the enraged losers attempted to follow and wrest the prize from him, but were prevented by the whalemen, who drove them back and then, shoving off the boats, rowed back to the ship.

"Have any trouble, Mr. Jennings?" asked Captain Gardner, when the boats were hoisted and the ship set on her course again.

"None at all, sir. I let 'em fight it out as you said. It was as good as a circus." The mate chuckled, reminiscently. "On the last pair o' boots a man fell outer the clouds somewhere an' lit into the bunch like a buzz-saw. He got the boots too. He's a reg'lar wildcat to my notion."

"H-mm! Shouldn't wonder if he made a good hand," surmised the skipper appreciatively. "Tell the cook to feed the five o' them an' I'll look 'em over in the morning."

At eight bells the next morning the new recruits were lined up at the break of the poop for the skipper's inspection. With the exception of the man who had won his boots in such a spectacular manner the islanders were all big, tousle-haired youngsters anywhere from eighteen to twenty-two years old, and clothed in nondescript garments more or less torn and so covered with patches that very little of the original texture was discernible.

The exception was much older, apparently. He was a man nearing forty and presented a most ludicrous appearance indeed, his long, lean body, dressed in flaming red underwear, shooting upward from the big, grained leather boots like a torch. Moreover, his features were buried in such a forest of hair and whiskers that only his eyes—one of which was swollen shut—and a large bony nose were exposed to view.

The sight of this apparition tickled Captain Gardner immensely. He broke into a broad grin which was reflected in the faces of the officers and boat-steerers hovering about.

"Well, you certainly caught a queer fish in your net, Mr. Jennings!" exclaimed the skipper. "He must 'a' been years gettin' all that hair out o' his system. But where's his clothes? Oh, I see! this is the feller that put up such a scrap last night, eh. He looks it, too."

Captain Gardner paused and stared hard at the man, fancying that he had caught a flash of amusement in the other's undamaged eye, which was of a piercing black.

"You savvy English?" he asked suspiciously.

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The Flores man assumed a bovine expression of stupidity. From somewhere in that thicket of hair issued a phrase in liquid Portuguese cadences—

"*Non comprehende.*"

"Humph!" said the skipper. "I'll warrant you'll comprehend the bread-barge quick enough by the look of that lean belly o' yours. Ask him if he's ever been whalin' before, Paul," he said, turning to a Portuguese boat-steerer.

The latter questioned the man and translated to the skipper:

"He say he whale from whaling-station long time. His name Antone Silva."

"Whalin'-station!" repeated the skipper animatedly. "I wonder now if——"

He turned abruptly to Antone.

"You *comprehende* whaleman Rucker, Dave Rucker?"

Antone shook his shaggy head.

"*Non comprehende*," he replied blankly.

"No, I guess not. Anybody that's worked with Dave Rucker remembers *him*, all right."

After learning that the rest of the recruits were just the ordinary half-farmer, half-fisherman type, Captain Gardner took them down into the cabin and, after signing them on the articles, gave each an outfit of clothes from the slop-chest.

"THAT man Antone fascinates me somehow. I just can't seem to keep my eyes off him when he's around," remarked Captain Gardner one morning, a week later, watching Antone as he ascended the fore rigging on his way to relieve one of the lookouts. "Might be 'cause he's got so much hair an' I ain't," he added, lifting his cap and caressing his shining pate ruefully. "But I've a feelin' I've seen him before somewhere. There's somethin' familiar about the cuss an' yet try my darndest I can't place him."

Mr. Jennings glanced aloft to where Antone was swinging expertly over the foretop, the bright red handkerchief swathing his neck describing a flaming arc.

"I don't see nothin' extraordinary about him," he observed uninterestedly. "If you cut that bale o' oakum off'n his head he wouldn't be no different from any other Portugee, to my notion. He's a mighty good seaman, though, I'll say that much for him."

Before the skipper could reply he, as well as the mate, gave a sudden joyful start as the subject of their converse, his head on a level with the t'gallant crosstrees, began to bellow:

"Ah, bl-o-o-w! Ah, bl-o-o-w!"

"He's got good eyesight, too!" snapped Captain Gardner, grabbing the glasses from the skylight and inserting his head through the strap. "What's the matter with them other fellers up there—asleep? Where away!" he cried, raising his voice to a roar at the lookouts.

"'Bout a mile on the port beam, sir!" replied the second officer who had also picked up the spout.

"Good! Get ready to lower, Mr. Jennings!" ordered the skipper, and in another moment he was stamping up the main rigging to the crow's-nest, with remarkable agility for a heavy man.

On deck the boat-crews were getting the boats ready. Line-covers were snatched off the tubs and thrown on deck, where they fell regardless. Falls were manned; there came the whir of davit sheaves, and five minutes after the whale had been sighted the boats were in the water. Quick work.

Captain Gardner, surveying the whale through his glasses, sucked his breath between his teeth in amazement.

"Godfrey mighty! He's as big as Noah's Ark," he told himself. "Just look at that head an' junk. It looms up like the Fairhaven Methodist Church. He's two hundred barrels if he's a gallon, I'll warrant."

The whale, a sperm bull, was moving very slowly through the water, evidently feeding, for the whale-birds hovering about him would occasionally swoop to the water and pick up a scrap. As the bull rolled a great, glistening side out of water Captain Gardner noticed a long, barnacle-covered line trailing from it. This line held a lot of significance to the old whaleman.

"You'll have to go mighty careful on that whale!" he shouted down to his officers. "He's been fastened to before by some other vessel. Shouldn't wonder if he's as full o' irons as a blacksmith's shop. He's probably wicked. So look out you don't get stove. Go an' get him!"

THE ship lay becalmed. But the sea was continually heaving up in glassy swells which made rowing more difficult than in a flat calm and prevented the officers from getting more than an occasional look at the whale.

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Captain Gardner, switching his glasses, momentarily, from the whale to the boats caught the flash of the red handkerchief about Antone's neck and chuckled.

"My," he muttered, "but he pulls a neat oar. I'll have a crackerjack boat-steerer outer that feller one o' these days. An' bimeby my memory may place him too."

The giant bull, busily engaged engulfing a large squid whose tentacles could be seen writhing on the surface of the water before they disappeared into the fleshy cavern, paid no heed to the three boats stealthily coming up on his flanks, out of sight of those wicked, red eyes, and with boat-steerers standing in the bows with glittering irons poised.

Mr. Jennings' boat was the first to get fast, his boat-steerer thudding home two irons in the yielding blubber. An instant later the second mate's boat-steerer duplicated the feat.

As the four harpoons sank to the hitches through fat and flesh, the whale, in a spasm of pain and rage disgorged the pulpy body of the squid and struck with his flukes—not a slap flat on the water, a spank rather, but a crushing, smashing sweep from side to side.

The whole starboard side of Mr. Jennings' boat was crushed in like so much paper, the mate, with an oath, freeing it from the whale by cutting the line with the hand-ax. The second mate's boat had fared but little better. It had been lifted nearly out of water spilling all of the crew overboard but Antone, who was knocked under the loom of a peaked oar and held there for a while. Had the boat turned completely over he would have been drowned like a rat in a trap. But the boat righted almost immediately and, as the whale started to run, went trailing along in dangerous proximity to the creature's flukes, and nearly half full of water.

Captain Gardner, sensing trouble, had put the cooper in charge of the ship-keepers and lowered the starboard boat, soon after the others started.

He was therefore close at hand when the accident occurred and, in company with the third mate's boat, began picking up the men in the water. This was but a matter of a few minutes and the captain turning to look at the whale, his mouth popped open with amazement.

The whale had stopped running and now lay about a hundred yards from the boats, but what caused the skipper's astonishment, as well as the rest, was the sight of Antone coolly hauling in the slack of the line and bringing the boat up close to the whale.

"Cut the line an' jump, you —— fool, before he spins you to ——," roared the skipper, failing to remember that Antone could not understand English.

Antone paid not the slightest attention, whether he understood or not, but hauled the boat up to the small of the whale—where the body tapers into the flukes like an ankle into a foot—and made the line fast to the forward thwart.

Then Antone picked up the razor-edged boat-spade, at the same time throwing his right arm out at right angles to his body in a signal for the boats to make no noise and to stand by.

"Idjut I was, not to know the cuss!" ground out Captain Gardner to Mr. Jennings, who was in the boat with him. "That's Dave Rucker or I'll eat my hat. No other man I know of makes the signal just that way. Vast pulling everybody an' don't make no noise. The devil is meaning to fluke that whale!"

There was no need to ask for silence however. For the whalemen, watching with straining eyes were appalled into dumbness at the audacity of the man who, without help, in a half-submerged boat, was about to attempt the most daring and the most reckless feat known in the business of whaling. A battle to the death between this monster of the deep and the man—this immense sea, like billowing glass, for the arena.

The whale, sensing some danger, shivered the entire length of his one hundred feet, his partly submerged body giving off a strong salty smell like codfish drying on racks in the sun.

The whaleman stood motionless, the spade ready in his hands—waiting.

"——! I'd like to have a chance to shake hands with you just once, Dave, before you get killed," moaned Captain Gardner, sweating under the strain.

Then slowly the whale's immense flukes left the water, like one raising a hand inch by inch perpendicularly. Up, up, they raised until, they poised, the size of a barn door, over the head of the man so pitiably dwarfed by the huge bulk of his antagonist.

Of a sudden the whale-birds fell silent, even the sea seemed to cease its breathing

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in that infinitesimal fraction of time while, the sun flashing in a myriad of rays from the flashing blade, the whaleman darted his spade upward into the bone and cartilage of the small—unjointing the flukes.

So quickly that the two acts seemed to blend one into the other, the whaleman threw himself sideways, and overboard. The ponderous flukes toppled from the bleeding stump like a felled tree and crashed onto the bow of the boat where, but a second before, had stood the doughty whaleman. The whale was done. He was a living ship with propeller and rudder gone. As such he was absolutely, and without danger to themselves, at the mercy of the whalemen.

"WELL, Dave, you showed me it could be done as you said!" observed Captain Gardner, still a little agitated, as he helped his dripping ex-mate into the boat. "But once is a plenty. I'm goin' to make you boat-header with a mate's pay but don't you dare try that trick again. I still hold to my opinion. Nobody but a darn fool would attempt it. S'pose you'd missed?"

"How'd you know 'twas me, cap'n?" inquired Dave, wringing the water from his beard and grinning at the skipper.

"I knowed just as soon as I saw a touch o' your work. Not even that hair mattress you got wrapped round your face could disguise that."

THOSE PERFIDIOUS SAVAGES

by **J. D. N.**

IT IS NOT customary to credit savages, especially Melanesian savages, with any knowledge of international trade relations. In fact, it is not customary to credit them with anything at all except a total disregard for human life.

Durmont D'Urville, the great French traveler, visiting the Torres Straits Islands in 1830, might have unearthed some interesting material, but he preferred to dismiss the people with a few brief words of contempt.

"They are," he says in his *Voyage autour du Monde*, "savage Melanesians akin to those of New Guinea, armed with bows and arrows, and they are ferocious, cruel, perfidious."

That they are armed with bows and arrows is perfectly correct, even today, but his summing up of their character goes to prove that ignorance is a greater breeder of contempt than familiarity.

The islands inhabited by these cruel and perfidious savages are small, low-lying and devoid of all trees suitable for canoe-building, yet they have canoes and large ones.

They import them from the Fly River Delta district of New Guinea, a distance of approximately 400 miles, even though the chances are they never journey beyond a radius of fifty miles from their homes.

When a new canoe is needed the order is passed on by word of mouth from atoll to atoll, from tribe to tribe, in a dozen different dialects, until it reaches the "manufacturers," probably bloodthirsty cannibals, who are absolutely unknown to the buyers.

In the course of time the canoe is built and despatched. It is relayed as the order was across the Straits and each village tests it, talks about it, and finally hands it on. When it reaches its ultimate destination it is then paid for—shell arm bands, necklaces, spear points, and these go back over the same leisurely route in the same leisurely fashion.

Both parties observe their contracts with fidelity for perfectly obvious reasons. The Delta cannibal wants the arm bands, so he builds with all his skill to insure further orders and to advertise his wares; the Torres Straits islander needs the canoe, and if he did not pay, his credit would be blasted within a radius of four hundred miles.

Of course, the practise is dying out today, like everything else in Melanesia, but this one characteristic alone surely points to a degree of commercial honesty rarely associated with perfidious savages.

If the white man gave the native the same square deal and kept his word as well as does the savage he might find it easier to extend his so-called civilizing mission.

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The Highwayman of the Marsh

by F. St. Mars

Author of "Mighty Motherhood," "Catching a Tatar," etc.

THERE was some sort of violent trouble going on down in the reeds beside the dike. The reed-buntings — some people might easily have mistaken them for sparrows, with their black heads and white mustaches—said so, swaying and balancing upon the bending reeds and calling the smaller makers of that trouble names in a harsh voice.

And all the rest of the reed people were saying so too, and it was an amazing thing how full of wild folk that apparently deserted reed-patch was, too. Each bit of the landscape, each type, is a world of its own, with its own special kind of population, and this one produced unexpectedly a pair of sedge-warblers, and a reed-warbler, atoms who gyrated and grated their annoyance; a willow-tit who made needle-point rebukes; a water-rail with a long beak and legs, running away like a long-legged pullet; a moor-hen very much concerned as to her nest; a big rat very much concerned as to the moor-hen's nest, too, but in a different way; a grass snake who glistened in the sun as if newly painted, and a spotted crake, who is even more of a running, winged, ventriloquial mystery than the corn-crake of a childhood hay-time. All of them were on thorns—though on reeds really—and evidently highly rattled and in a state of nerves over the trouble in the reeds.

And not much wonder either; for, judging by the sounds, murder was being done in there among the secret recesses of the swishing green stems—murder, cruel and violent, in spite of the sunshine and the light of day.

And then, all of a sudden, in the midst of almost a gasp of silent horror, a moment of speechlessness on the part of the wild lookers-on, out came the trouble, rolling over and over and over upon the soft, short-cropped grass of the dike-bank, and—they all saw. Also they all, except the little warblers, who were safe more or less, and stayed to blaspheme the public nuisance, instantly and in the same moment remembered appointments elsewhere, and went to keep them with a haste that was noticeable and wonderful.

There before them was a hare. But a hare is a gentle and altogether negligible wild person. This hare, however, was fighting, and fighting like several furies, and grunting, and making all sorts of unhare-like motions and commotions against another beast; and that other beast was most emphatically not a hare.

It, or rather he, was big, as bigness is counted among four-footed wild folk in England today. Probably he could stretch the tape to twenty-three inches, of which about sixteen was very long, low body, with sturdy, lion-like, dumpy legs; the rest being rather thick, furry tail.

Not a big beast maybe; but in the wild he ruled big, being snaky and of a fighting trim, so to say. He was in fact a very

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fiend; and he looked it—hard as nickel steel. A dull, tawny fiend, with a peculiar purplish sheen in some lights on his short, hard coat—due to the longer hair—turning black on his throat, legs and tail, as if he had walked in black somewhere and finished off with patches of creamy white on head and ears. There was an extraordinary air of hard, cool, cruel fighting power and, slow ferocity about the beast—a very natural-born gladiator of the wild places.

Men called him polecat, apropos of nothing about him apparently, for he had no connection with poles or cats; or foumart, apropos of his *very* un-nose-like smell: *i.e.*, fou—foul; mart—marten, his nearest relation; or, again, fitchett, as our forefathers termed him.

But never mind. What's in a name anyway? A big doe hare with a leveret or two *not* for sale—and that doe's leverets must have been in the rushes somewhere—may upon occasion show unexpected fighting powers.

And this one did. The polecat was kicked in the stomach and kicked and scratched in the ribs and thumped on the nose and kicked and scratched and thumped on the head before he could get in the death-stroke, the terrible, lightning thrust at the brain's base, which, like the sword-stroke that ends a bull-fight, drops the victim as if struck by electricity.

And then he had whirled and was darting headlong for the reeds. He galloped in an odd, jumpy, sidelong gallop, as if he were a sort of glorified wild dachshund.

It did not take him long to inspect the reed-patch, to search it from end to end with his nose. His mind was soon made up to the fact that the wretched leverets had vanished, and that no scenting of his keen nose could find them.

They had gone evidently—quitted like the pair of obedient children that they were, while their mother was cleverly holding the foe and making demonstrations in his front; and now the pair of them were probably far away; and there was nothing for him to do but go and dine upon the old hare, which he did, taking, according to his custom, little more than a bite and a sip before passing on.

Then he turned and meandered off on the war-path. And this was a serious business, and a busy one. It was downright hard labor; for he worked his ground properly and for all it was worth, having a lot to kill and not much time to kill it in.

Times he sat bolt upright and stared knowingly around; that, because of his short legs giving him such a limited view if he did not. Times he climbed a mole-heap. Times he hunted head down—and again one noticed the hound-like manner—in every possible direction, questing, casting here, casting there, working back, throwing forward, describing circles and poking into and out of every reed-patch, bramble-heap, furze-clump or other bit of cover that that coverless land offered.

AND then suddenly he stopped. And then suddenly he ran forward. And then suddenly—the scent carrying him right smack bang out into the open—he dropped flat and began to crawl.

He crept and he crept and he crept across that absolutely bare, flat ground, with never a tuft of fur nor a feather of a single live thing upon it to be seen, till one might have thought that he had gone mad and was stalking an illusion.

Finally he stopped. And this was the oddest thing of all, because if any creature could show intense excitement without showing it, that is to say, without muscle, eyelid, hair or limb moving, that polecat did then; and yet, stare as one would upon the absolutely bare grass, scattered only here and there with a stone or a rat's skull or a daisy—all looking alike in their whiteness from a distance—not a living, breathing thing was to be seen.

And yet there was a living, breathing thing there. Indeed there were quite several. It was only the eye that was deceived—not the nose; at least not the polecat's nose—motionless.

Right in front of the polecat, within spring, still as the very ground, the buffish, whitish check of a peewit, lapwing, or green plover would have been mistaken for one of the many stones; the thin, curving top-knot for a stem of the thin, harsh grass; the low curve of the dark back with its light reflections in green for no more than the natural curve of the close-cropped turf.

And she was on her nest—which was no nest, but a scrape-back—depending on her natural assimilation into her surroundings to see her through. And the polecat knew she was there, and he knew she was on her nest—she would not have been fool enough

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to keep there otherwise. His nose told him—not his eyes probably, for that was nearly impossible.

The thing was, he wanted her to move. That was what he was waiting for. No more than the twitch of an eyelid would do to show him which end was head and which tail; for he could only smell her, and in a manner would have to pounce blind if she did not move.

She did not move, however, and in the end he had to pounce blind anyhow, so suddenly, so unexpectedly when it did come, shifting like a streak, that there seemed to have been no time to shout even, or gasp. Yet that peewit found time in that fraction of a second to rise, open her wings and get two feet into the air.

And then the polecat took her, leaping with unexpected agility and pulling her down out of limitless freedom and safety. There was just a rush, a snap, a wild bird squawk, and down the pair went, to the accompaniment of furiously fluttering wings, and in a cloud of feathers.

She had made a slight mistake in her calculations, that peewit—a matter of perhaps a quarter of a second, but enough. Nature has not got much room for those who commit slight mistakes in the wild; they quit the stage before passing that habit on, mostly, or soon after.

For a moment there was a horrible, strenuous jumble of fur and feathers on the ground; and then the polecat's flat head rose up on its long neck out of the jumble, his eyes alight with a new look and his lifted upper lip stained with a single little bright carmine spot.

He pivoted upon his shanks and examined the nest. It was empty.

He got to his feet with rapidity, and in great excitement dropped his head and began hunting. In a minute a mottled pebble seemed to get up under his nose and run. He snapped at it, and it fell upon the grass, stretching out slowly in death—a baby peewit.

He circled rapidly, stopped, swerved, and at the center took up another scent. Suddenly, in a tussock of marram, his nose and he stopped dead. Nothing moved. Then he bit, and a second buff-and-black mottled soft body stretched slowly out into the open as death took it—a second baby peewit.

He circled again, fairly racing now, and so nearly fell over a third pebble come to life that it scuttled back between his legs; but he spun upon himself like a snake and caught it ere it had gone a yard. He snapped again, held it, dropped it; and another downy, soft, warm chick thing straightened, horribly and pathetically, in the unpitying sun, and was still—a third baby peewit.

But there were no more. He hunted around and around for the next ten minutes, but never struck a trail. Evidently there had only been three. And all the time father peewit, who had just come back from dinner, swooped and stooped and dived and rocketed and shot down and around, his wings humming through the still air above as he went clean mad and seemed like to break his neck and the polecat's back in any and every one of his demented abysmal plunges, but somehow never did quite. And all the time the polecat, without seeming to take the slightest notice of him, was watching him out of the corner of his eye, hoping for a chance while he hunted.

But this was not intended as an exhibition of "frightfulness," though the beast had slain far more innocents than he could eat. It was part of his duty; and though men have accused his kind of being possessed of a joy of killing, the accusation is by no means proven, and in any case the accused might reply to civilization—

"Same to you, sirs, and many hundreds of times more so!"

Anyway he now picked up a young peewit and made for the nearest dike. Then along this, and presently into the water and across to the other side, swimming strongly and well. Then along a smaller dike, hugging the reeds as much as possible and pursued by a running fire of abuse from reed- and sedge- and marsh- and grasshopper-warblers, from wagtails, meadow pipits and buntings, larks, and all the small bird population of those parts, till he came to the sea-bank, called by the natives "sea-wall." This was a high, grass-bearded bank designed to constrain the waters of the estuary; and there in a hole, curtained by a dandelion and guarded by the still spears of the coarse marram grass, he stuffed his victim.

The burrow was not empty when he came to it, for it already contained two moorhen's eggs; but there was still room for more, and one by one he fetched the remainder of

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his victims, mother and all, that way, and stuffed them into that burrow, with a plodding, steady, exact doggedness of purpose that was rather surprizing in a mere wild beast, who, if seen casually, would have appeared to the ordinary man to be merely aimlessly wandering about the landscape. And indeed this was not quite such a simple and "soft" job as it looked. Grit was needed to accomplish it, even.

There was for instance the sudden, far too suggestive swirl in the water as he crossed the dike for the third time, loaded, that gave more than a hint of some unknown—and therefore the more sinister—haunter of those muddled depths of pollution, who took more than passing interest in the smell of blood, and must to judge by the swirl have been too big to be safe. And that was probably a giant female eel—as dangerous a foe as any swimmer of his size—though he ate eels—might care to face.

Then there was the marsh harrier—and the same might have been a kind of owl if it wasn't a sort of hawk—who flapped up like some gigantic moth and dogged his steps, only waiting—he felt sure of it—for the polecat to slip or meet a foe or have an accident or something, before breaking its own avine neutrality.

Then, too, there was the stoat—or rather not the stoat only, but the stoat and his wife—who would have murdered him from cover in the most meaning sort of way.

And finally there was the lean, nosing, sneaking dog, the egg-thief, who had no business there with his yolk-spattered, slobbering jaws, plundering the homes of the wild feathered ones—he who was only a tame slave, and a bad one at that. But the dog followed the polecat into a jungle-like reed fastness, and—almost never came out again! When he did, it was to the accompaniment of varied and assorted howls, and at about the biggest thing in the speed line he had ever evolved. He was no end glad to get out, and the distant haze swallowed him wonderfully quickly, still howling every yard of the way—for that polecat's teeth once felt were nothing to laugh at or forget.

These things he accomplished as the night was beginning to fall, and the solemn eye of the setting sun—such an eye of such a setting sun as the estuary alone knows, bloodshot and in a sky asmoke as of cities burning—regarded him as he finished and stood back outside, as one who considers. He was a grim figure of outlawry and rapine, alone there in that lonely place amidst the gathering, dank gray of the marsh mists, the red rays touching his coat and turning it to deep purple and his eyes to dull ruby flame; a beast, once seen, you would not forget and could never mistake.

BUT his work was not yet done. He was hungry again; but for him there could be no more food yet, and he turned with the same immutable and dumbly dogged air that characterized so many of his actions, and made off down the sea-bank.

Once he hid—vanished utterly would better express it—aside to avoid the passage of an eel-spearer, an inhabitant of the estuary almost as amphibious and mysterious as himself. Once he very nearly caught a low-flying snipe as he leaped up at it while cutting low over the top of the "bank"; and once—here he sprang aside with a half-stifled snarl and every bristle erect—he was very nearly caught by a horrible steel-toothed trap, set there to entertain that same plundering dog, by reason of the small matter of a late lamb or two that had suddenly developed bites, not obviously self-inflicted, in the night.

Then he crossed the dike at the foot of the sea-wall, shook himself, sat down to scratch, and straightway hurled himself backward and to one side as something that resembled a javelin whizzed out of six straggling, upright, faded tawny reeds at the water's edge, by which he had sat. The javelin struck deep into the little circle of lightly pressed-down grass where his haunches had rested, and he caught a glimpse, or only a half-glimpse, of weird onyx eyes, and heard strange and shuddery reptilian hissings. Eyes and noises might have belonged to a crocodile or some huge lizard thing or snapping turtle; but the javelin was clearly the property of no such horror, and was very obviously a beak—now, by the way, withdrawn.

Followed the harsh rattle and swish of big feathers and vast wings—he felt the draft of them—the dim outline, as it were of a ghost, of some great shape rising into the gloom and as instantly vanishing over the sea-wall; and he was alone, *and*—there were now three upright and faded reeds in the clump near which he had sat him down

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by the water's edge to scratch, *not six*. The thing, the portent, the apparition, had been the *other* three; yet one could have sworn to the six reeds before it moved.

And the worst of it was that he did not know from frogs and fresh water what the thing was. He had never glimpsed such a sudden death before, and had no burning desire to do so again, for he was shrewd enough to know that, but for that flingback of his the javelin would have struck him, and struck him like a stuck pig, perhaps through the skull!

Oh, polecat! The bird was a bittern, relation of the heron's, and if not quite so long, makes up for it in strength and fiery, highly developed courage.

Caution is not the polecat's trump card, as it is the cat's, but if ever he trod carefully it was thence onward as he threaded the dike-cut and the pool-dotted gloom. He came upon a lone bull bellowing and gave him room. He came upon something unknown, but certainly not a lone bull, bellowing too; it was the bittern, and he gave that plenty of room.

He came upon two moor-hens, fighting as if to the death; but *he* was the death, and slew one of them from behind neatly—and had to go back with it, past both bellowings, to a second burrow in the sea-bank, where he put it; and later he came upon only seven great, mangy, old, stump-tailed, scarred, horrible ghouls of shore rats, all mobbing a wounded seagull—a herring gull—with a broken wing.

The gull lived; but that was no fault of the polecat's, for she managed to run off into the surrounding darkness what time he was dealing warily but effectively with one of those yellow-toothed, murderous rats whose bite is poison—in what dear, kind-hearted people might have said was a most praiseworthy rescue of the poor, dear, beautiful bird! (The poor, dear, beautiful bird, be it whispered, had himself swallowed a fat-cheeked and innocent-eyed baby rabbit whole that very day, before she was herself wounded; but—never mind!)

The polecat, after one wary sniff, did not seem to think the rat worthy of a journey to the sea-bank and decent burial, and passed on, the richer for a drink of rat's blood perhaps, but very hungry. He came upon a redshank's nest in a tuft of grass. The redshank, who was much the cut of a snipe, plus red-orange legs, must have heard or seen him coming in the new, thin moonlight, and told all the marsh about it with a shrieking, whistled:

"Tyopl Tyopl"

But the nest contained four eggs, which the polecat took in lieu of anything bigger, carrying two—one journey for each—all the way to the sea-bank and yet another hole he had previously scraped, or found, therein. One of the other two eggs he consumed himself, and was just making off with number four, when something came galloping over the marsh in the moonlight, splashing through the pools, and making, in that silence, no end of a row for a wild creature.

The polecat stood quite still, with his long back arched, his sturdy, short forepaws anchored tense, and his short, rounded ears alert, and watched it come, not because he wanted to, but because there did not happen to be any cover thereabout, and to move might give him away.

When he saw that the beast was long and low, and short-legged and flat-headed, his long outer fur began to bristle. Those outlines were the trade-marks of his own tribe—not necessarily his own species—and were, he knew, more likely to mean touch-trouble than anything else. Then he realized that the path of the new arrival would take it right toward him; and that was bad, because to move now and get out of the way was hopeless. Also he could see the size of the beast now, and that was worse than bad—some ten inches to a foot worse.

The beast held a wild duckling in its jaws, and the little body, with its stuck-out, webbed feet, flapped and flopped dismally from side to side as the animal cantered along with a somewhat shuffling, undulating gait. And then the polecat became transfixed. He had recognized the newcomer. He knew the breed, and would have given a lot not to have molested that redshank's abode and be found there.

The other beast—palpably a large, sinuous and wicked proposition—came right up to the polecat, standing there rigid, erect, motionless and alone in the moonlight, with the fourth egg between his paws, and then stopped dead, almost touching him. Apparently it saw him then for the first time. Certainly it was not pleased; it said so under its breath in a low growl.

The polecat said nothing, perhaps because he had nothing to say.

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The beast was an otter, and an old one. Also it appeared to be suffering from a grouch.

The polecat felt uncomfortable. He was eying the other's throat and marking just the place where he meant to take hold if things came to the worst; but he knew all the time that the other, although her eyes had never been removed for a fraction off his face, was really watching the egg. Probably she had young to feed; the presence of the duckling darkly hinted at it. If so, so much the worse for the polecat!

Then she put down her duckling and growled again; but the polecat might have been carved in unbarked oak for all the sign of life he gave. Then—she sailed in!

It was really very neatly and prettily done; for as an exponent of lithesome agility the otter is—when the pine marten is not by—certainly quite *it*. The polecat seemed to side-twist double, making some sort of lightning play with his long neck and body as she came, and—he got his hold. Yes, he got his hold all right; the only thing was to stay there; for, being a polecat and a member of the great, the famous weasel tribe, part of his fighting creed was to *stay there*.

When, however, hounds fail to puncture an otter's hide, any beast might be pardoned for losing its grip; but he did not. Between the tame hounds' fangs and his smaller wild ones was some difference—about the difference between our teeth and a savage's, multiplied once or twice—and the old she-otter, who had felt hounds' teeth in her life, realized the difference. Also it hurt; and still the polecat did not lose his hold.

Then, maddened, wild with rage, the rage of one who expects a walkover and gets a stem-winder in the jaw for keeps instead, that old bitch otter really got to work. She recoiled like a coiled snake, and the polecat felt fire in one loin.

By the moonlight it looked like the contortions of one big, furry beast twisted with cramp. You could not possibly separate the combatants or tell there *were* two. But the polecat fought only because he dared not expose his flank with the foe facing him; now, however, as they both rolled, he—

Hi! It was done in an instant. At a moment when the roll brought him on top and when the otter was shifting her own hold for another and more deadly, which might have "put him to sleep" forever, he miraculously twisted and writhed cat-fashion, and with one mighty wrench—a good strip of his skin and fur had to go in that pull, but it couldn't be helped—he had broken the otter's hold, leaped clear of the clinch and was gone.

The otter was up before one could guess what had happened and was drumming away on his heels; but she soon pulled up, realizing that a polecat may be slow in the books, but not so slow in real life, with her to assist speed. Anyway she seemed slower; and in any case she could not hope to follow him in the intricacy of holes and cover he was sure to take to, like a fish to water. Moreover, she was spitting up blood, result of friend polecat's neat and natty strangle-hold on her throat, and felt more in need of the egg—which she had won, at any rate—than a wild-goose chase.

LIKE a thin, wavy line through the night friend polecat got himself to the sea-bank, to a hole in the sea-bank, to the very depths of that hole; and there, in the shape of two angrily smoldering, luminous orbs shining steadily through the pit-like dark, he stayed. Most of the time he used up in licking his wounds. They needed it; for, though clean, the punctures from the otter's canines had driven deep, and a red trail of drops marked the polecat's route to his lair—one lair.

Not that he was entirely ignored. Blood trails are always items of interest in the wild, especially in the dark hours while man sleeps. Thus there came to the mouth of the hole once, scufflings and the noise as of an eager, inquisitive crowd—rats, who hoped for a chance to get their own back on a detested foe; but one evil snarl from the wounded beast removed them, convinced that the time was not yet.

Once, also, something sniffed out of the stilly night, and that was a fox; but one snap from within, a perfectly abominable smell, and the narrowness of the accommodation proved too much for Br'er Fox, and he, with an insolent cock of the brush, retired. Then too there was a rabbit, not looking where he was going, who got half down the burrow before he realized the awful truth, and went out backward like a cat with a salmon-tin on its head.

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But 'way along toward dawn there came an altogether different sort of sound somehow—a sort of a little chuckling sound; and the polecat, answering it, came out. He looked rather less awful now than when he had gone in.

A form was standing outside, a dark, low, long form like himself; and like himself you could become aware of it easily without seeing it, and even with your handkerchief to your nose. It was his wife, smaller, but no less dangerous, than he. She was carrying an old hen redshank in her jaws, its long beak and one wing clearly silhouetted against the moon; and apparently she would be very pleased if her husband would come out of the hole and make room for her to stuff the redshank into it.

Then together they moved at their indescribable undulating gait—they looked like a snake between them in the moonlight along the sea-bank—till they came, with caution and many clever tricks of vanishing in case anybody might be watching, to yet another burrow, screened completely and very neatly guarded by the splayed leaves of a bunch of frosted sea-holly.

Both beasts went into the burrow, at the end of which was a nest containing live things, which squirmed and made little tiny infant noises in the darkness. They were the polecats' children, four of them, all quite young and all very hungry and very lively indeed; and they explained a good deal of the reason for the stores of food set by in the other burrows in the sea-wall.

But they did not explain quite all; for unless Mrs. Polecat liked her dinner "high" —and there was nothing to show that she did—or unless Mr. Polecat had got a craze for collecting specimens and eggs or forgot where half of his trophies were hidden as a natural habit of absent-mindedness, one can not quite see the reason for hiding so much so soon before the young could feed upon the "specimens." However, probably the two beasts knew their own business best.

The old male polecat seemed to anyway; for just as the first flicker of dawn was paling the eastern sky he went off down to the mist-hidden dike and in no more than ten short minutes returned with an eel—which was protesting violently in that horrible way eels have—which he promptly proceeded to decapitate and eat.

The afternoon had still some little time to run when the waving grass down the side of the sea-bank and the half of a glimpse of dull tawny fur gave away the male polecat leaving his earth for the war-path—was he ever anything else than on the war-path if he moved abroad at all?—once more. That, even from above, was all the indication he gave of his exit; but although it is a rule in the wild that self-advertisement is most unhealthful, there may be times when a beast like the polecat might not advertise itself enough. And this was one of those times.

Far overhead, circling grandly on effortless, still, great pinions, swimming, one might say, in the dome of the sky, a big bird known as a buzzard, was staring downward with the flashing, sheathed glance of all birds of prey at the world below. She too had young, and simply had to find a meal. The hour was late, and her success *nil*. Perhaps that accounted for much. Perhaps, however, that all she saw was that half-glimpse of dull tawny fur accounted for still more; that is to say, she probably made a mistake.

Anyway the polecat was suddenly aware of a sound like the swish of a lady's skirt in the air above him, and of a dimming of the light. He sprang forward first and glanced up second—knowing the rules of the wild—but he was too late, for in that second the long, hooked talons of the bird came down through the grass and gripped. It was an awful handshake; for the bird, as has been said, was a buzzard, who is a sort of smaller and less kingly edition of the eagle without the imperial power.

For a few seconds there followed an awful struggle, great wings beating mightily downward, beak hammering and fangs meeting the hammerings with audible clashings. It seemed that the bird could not quite lift the beast, and that the beast could not quite retain connection with solid earth.

And then the bird rose. Slowly, strainingly, with her vast pinions winnowing the air with deep "how-hows," like mighty fans, rose she, still gripping the struggling polecat hard by the back in a locked clutch of steel—up and up, and out over the estuary, growing slowly from a great bird to a medium-sized one, to a small one, to a smaller, and a smaller, all the time fighting, it seemed, like a mad creature to gain the

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upper air, to climb to the clouds, as a drowning man fights his way upward in the water. And there was reason: The old polecat's jaws were fast in a vice grip upon her throat.

Never a sound broke the silence that brooded for ever—in spite of the wind—over the lake-like, flattened expanse of the estuary, save the deep "how-how" of the buzzard's superb pinions as she climbed slowly into the sublime vault of the heavens—never a sound from bird or from beast. The beast hung on, dumbly dogged, with fangs that met in the flesh there beneath the stained feathers, and the blood of the bird mingled with the blood of the beast, as it trickled slowly down over his mangled head, upon which one fearful claw of the buzzard was clutched in an awful grip. The bird struggled dumbly also, upward, ever upward, gasping, with open beak and staring eyes, fighting vainly for the breath she could not draw. Till at last the two were no more than a speck, one little dark, indefinite speck, like a mote on the eyes, floating athwart the great, piled, fleecy mountains of the clouds.

And then quite suddenly, so suddenly that it was almost like pricking a bladder, the end came. The magnificent, vast, overshadowing pinion collapsed; the bird reeled, toppled for an instant in the void and then slid back and down, faster and faster and faster, turning over and over, in one long, sickening, appalling dive back to earth.

A watcher, had there been one, might have seen just as the last rays of the setting sun touched the steely reaches of the estuary, turning them to lakes of crimson, something, some body—or bodies truly, for they were locked together—suddenly appear, streaking down headlong from out of the heavens. There followed a single terrific splash far out over the tide, an upheaval of waters, a succession of little ripples hurrying outward, ever outward, to tell the tale, and then—nothing.

A party of mournfully shrieking, black-backed herons, common and black-headed gulls were gathered around the soaked and bedraggled carcasses of a polecat and a buzzard, stranded by the falling tide upon a mud spur, and still locked savagely and implacably in death.

Half a mile away, in the darkness of her burrow, the she-polecat stirred uneasily in her sleep, and, waking for a moment, stared out at the still, silent, secret marshes, wondering perhaps why her mate had not returned.

And ten miles away, far up in their great nest among the boughs of a mighty Scotch fir, three downy but already fierce-eyed buzzard nestlings craned their necks upward, calling hungrily, and wondering why their mother had not returned; while their father shot and swerved backward and forward over the treetops, mewing and calling, uneasy and lonely, to the clouds for his wife, who had so mysteriosuly and unaccountably disappeared. And so—fate and the end.

WHAT THE BUFFALO LIVED ON

by Frank H. Huston

BUFFALO grass, the richest and most nutritious grass of all North America, grew in thick short bunches, never exceeding three inches in height, with curious crimpled curly leaves or spears so matted that walking on it was like treading on a horse hair mattress. In appearance withered and dry except in early Spring, it provided throughout the year perpetual forage for the innumerable herds of buffalo and game found from the plains of the Saskatchewan to the Rio Grande, but it was in the Platte Valley it was found in its glory, the country being practically carpeted with its luxuriant growth.

Today it is unknown, having disappeared more completely than the animals that fed upon it and from whom it derived its name. Like many another wild thing, civilization was its deadly enemy, and without the migratory game to disseminate the seed, and under the blighting influence of the plow and "white men's deer," its place knew it no more and it is but now a memory. Thirty years ago, the writer came across a small patch in New Mexico and the sight brought tears to the eyes of his companion, an old timer of the days when the real Americans roved undisputed the Empire of the West.

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Haunted Skyways

a complete novelette by Thomson Burtis

Author of "The Moment of Greatness," "The Airwaymen," etc.

THE plum dropped into my oversized and delighted mouth on the first day of May, thereby causing me to crown myself king of the May there and then.

It was at the hour of putting on the midday feedbag in the Mechanics' School bachelors' mess. Donovan Field, Texas, is the biggest flying field in the world, and the Mechanics' School is about half of it.

My duties as one of Uncle Sam's tallest flyers had not been arduous that morning, for which I had given thanks. It was so hot the electric fans melted. I had been called on to give a half hour's instruction to each of three cadets—the cadets we have always with us—and then was through for the morning. Having sought in vain for sleep, and then for snappy reading, I had finally been forced to peruse a book of poetry to pass away the time.

My roommate, Jerry Francis, had for his latest flame collected a young lunchhound of an esthetic turn of mind, and she had him gasping for breath over matters of culture like poetry. It was one of these little books that sell about two hundred copies all over the country. The poet is always offering the world or a million bucks or something else he hasn't got for just one squint at his lady love. Occasionally he gets hard-boiled and insists on just one kiss before he croaks, but isn't usually that particular.

I remember I was giving my ideas about poetry to the assembled dozen or so flyers around the table when in walked Grayson, our obliging and bone-headed adjutant. He was late, as usual. A meal was nothing in his young life compared to a nice juicy endorsement.

"Mail for you, Slim," he said to me and gave me a long, wicked-looking envelope with the War Department's letterhead up in the corner.

I thought probably I'd forgot to pay a bill somewhere and they'd sent it through military channels, but it was not so.

Four sheets of thin paper fell out, and I saw that they were orders. Here's what met the gaze of my popping optics:

Washington, D. C.
April 20, 19—

Special Orders
No. 346

Extract

* * *

2. The following named officers will proceed from their present stations to Eelyville, New York, reporting upon their arrival to Captain E. D. Harrik, A. S. for duty ferrying three (3) L. D. 2 airplanes from Eelyville, New York, to Ellington Field, Houston, Texas. Actual and necessary expenses while en route by air will be paid, not to exceed eight dollars per diem.

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1st Lieutenant John Evans, A. S. Donovan Field, Texas.
1st Lieutenant Donald M. Goodhue, A. S. Maria, Texas.
1st Lieutenant Aloysius T. Hembrook, A. S. Langham Field, Va.
The travel directed is necessary in the military service.
By order of the Secretary of War:

Chief of Staff.

Official:

Adjutant General

I ought to have known, right there, that there was some poison in the plum, so to speak. I'm the unluckiest cuss in the world to still be a flyer, and alive. If there was a war started tomorrow I'd either be married or a cripple just before it broke out, and miss it.

However, that order certainly looked like a check for a thousand dollars to me. The bunch listened to my spirited reading of it and groaned enviously, as well they might. For the first time in my life I did not regret that while in France during the late war I had had some big-ship experience. These L. D. 2s, commonly known as "Tankwings," were three-motored ships. Evidently the ones we were to ferry down to Houston were the first three ships manufactured by the Greeley Airplane Company on their contract for fifty of them. Their plant was at Eelyville, just outside New York City.

I could see how I got in on the trip, as I said, because I did some Caproni flying with the Italians. I started the war as a pursuit pilot, got one German I didn't get credit for and got credit for one German that I didn't get, leaving me a net of one Boche to my belt. It might have been more if I hadn't carelessly tried to lick the von Krutoffen circus one balmy day at five thousand meters, and ended up just back of our front lines full of blasphemy, bullets and broken ribs.

After I got out of the hospital I went to Italy and the big Wop Scouts, as we called the three-motored Capronis. Don Goodhue, an old friend of mine, had flown a lot of Martin Bombers during the bombing of the battleships at Langham Field, and had also had a crack at one of those giant Handley-Pages that cluttered up Langham.

What I couldn't understand, however, was the in inclusion of Loot Aloysius T. Hembrook. I knew him slightly; got acquainted when I was at Langham for the bombing last Summer. He was short, rather stout, and prematurely gray. He talked in a deep and sonorous voice and was never unmindful of his dignity, of which he had enough to make up for what the remainder of the flyers lack. As near as I could see, he went around in a state of perennial shocked surprize because nobody but himself took Aloysius Hembrook seriously.

How and why he ever got in the Air Service nobody could tell. I'd be less surprized to see the Secretary of State go into vaudeville in a song and dance act. The idea of Aloysius in the Air Service was just that sacrilegious. So far as I knew he was one of these birds that get ten flights a month to draw their pay, and take 'em all right on the field. He had steered a Martin Bomber precariously around the field a few times, but in general he was well satisfied to have both feet right on the ground.

The rest of the bunch around the lunch-table couldn't figure it, either. But then, the Government moves in a mysterious way its wonders to perform.

Major Stratton, our C. O., called me to headquarters that afternoon and informed me that Goodhue and I were to be at Eelyville not later than May 6th, which left us little spare time. Inasmuch as I yearned for a large night or two in Gotham while in its electric-lighted vicinity, I got busy on the phone and in three or four hours had Goodhue on the wire. As a result of our conversation Don threw a couple of suitcases into a DeHaviland and set sail for Donovan from the border. He got in after dark, while I was in San Antonio getting tickets.

DON is a slim, good-looking fellow of around twenty-five, with brown hair that he parts in the middle and a pair of sparkling brown eyes. He enjoys life, and doesn't care who knows it. He talks very slowly, but he can pick the English language up by the tail and swing and twist it about with the greatest of gusto.

I found him in my quarters, puffing a cheroot which he had inserted in what is undoubtedly the longest cigaret-holder in the world.

"What's our route back, I wonder?" he enquired after mutual congratulations on our luck.

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"Probably Harrik will have detailed orders," I told him. "Know him? He's the Government inspector at the Greeley plant, and an old friend of mine."

Don shook his head.

"I never associate with captains or majors or others of high rank," he said. "They rebuff me painfully. By the way, you know that the Greeleys aren't in charge of the factory, don't you?"

"No. What'd they do—sell out?"

Don nodded.

"Some new company bought out the whole plant, and the first thing they did was to go out and get the contract for fifty L. D. 2s at seventy thousand dollars per each, thereby underbidding everybody else by a slight margin of five thousand or so per crate. Must be hustlers."

"Our tickets are for the one o'clock S. P. to New Orleans tomorrow," I informed him. "How are you sitting financially? It'll be a long time and many a hotel bill before we draw that eight per day."

Goodhue flourished his ornate cigaret-holder airily. He was walking up and down my pint-size boudoir with characteristic long strides.

"I got the deal in the blackjack game last night, held it for an hour and half, and the four leaf clovers sprouted under my feet," he proclaimed in his deliberate, smiling way. "I could hit twenty with an ace six times out of five."

That made it salubrious. I was well-heeled myself. I had an uncle who was a pretty prominent senator, and he had died six months before, leaving me five thousand berries to remember him by. I still had a thousand of it left.

We eased into citizens' clothes next day, and blew ourselves to a drawing-room for the long trip over to New Orleans and up the coast. The wearing of civilian clothes while off duty was certainly a boon to me—I'm a freak at best, and when in breeches and blouse everybody looks at me as if I was advertising something. What the Washington monument is among statues I am among my fellowmen—tall, simple and plain. I am six feet four, to be exact, and so thin I have to stand twice in the same place to make a shadow. There are three more striking things about me: my hands, my feet and my nose.

I mention these things to keep you from getting a mental picture of me as having any resemblance to these movie stars that have their pictures taken in helmet and goggles. When I come out of the air I'm a lanky, greasy, oil-grimed bird in dirty coveralls.

The time passed pretty quickly, considering. Don and I agreed that our probable route would be New York to Dayton, then to Louisville, where there was a Government field, and from there on to Memphis, Little Rock, Dallas, San Antonio and Houston. There was a field at each of these villages, and the Tankwings we were to fly carried four or five hours of gasoline. We were anxious to get our paws on these babies—they had been advertised as the last word in up-to-date ships, and up-to-date ships were something that neither of us had ever had any extended opportunity to fly.

We were easing into the last lap of the trip—Washington to New York—when the perusal of a newspaper caused a bright idea to smite me.

"Donald, my boy, I presume you do not know it, but the Kentucky Derby is to be run at Churchill Downs, Louisville, Kentucky, on Saturday of next week. Unless I'm badly mistaken, Louisville will be one of our landing fields. Goddard Field, at Camp Henry, is just outside the town, you know. With a little manipulation——"

"We might arrange to take it in," grinned Goodhue. "The thought does you credit."

If there's anything in particular I care about, it's a thoroughbred, and I'd rather spend an afternoon watching those beauties race with a few dollars of mine wrapped around one of their noses than anything I know. We fell into a learned discussion as to whether or not Morvich was a flash-in-the-pan. I was compelled to preach at length, for the benighted Goodhue had the perverted idea that Morvich was nearly as good a horse as Exterminator.

"Did you say you knew Harrik, this Government inspector at the factory?" Goodhue asked after we'd left Trenton behind, wallowing in its own smoke.

"He was a cadet with me, and we were pretty close friends," I told him. "Nice chap—graduate mechanical engineer, and he's also a recent graduate of the engineering course at Cook Field. He's not so much of a flyer. I don't think he's even interested in that part of it so much as he is the engineering problems. I haven't

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seen him for nearly three years, but we correspond occasionally. He's married now, and he's probably tickled to death with his job as adviser and inspector at the Greeley factory."

"We might as well go straight out to Eelyville—it's only two o'clock, Eastern time," suggested Goodhue. "You can call him up from the city to save the onerous task of finding the factory after we get there. I wonder if friend Aloysius is already on the ground?"

"Probably. He's always two hours ahead of time for a train to make sure the road hasn't New Yorked him by switching the time-table. He's probably been here three days, seeking out all available information."

I was right. We got Harrik on the wire from New York, and he was at the train to meet us at Eelyville. Hembrook was with him.

II

AS I introduced Goodhue to Harrik I wondered at the change in Ed. I remembered him as a tall, husky-looking fellow with a rather full face, untidy black hair, and always sporting a pair of rubber-tired glasses. He was much thinner, and instead of the careless clothes and general air of absent sloppiness about him he was now well-groomed, spick and span from head to toe. He was in civilian clothes. His eyes seemed slightly sunk in his head, and there was an unhealthy glitter in them, as though he was under a strain. He had always been rather a reserved, quiet fellow, but now he talked nervously and much.

Aloysius Hembrook was the same old penny. Greeted us with a dignified smile, dressed in full uniform. I don't mean to give the impression that Hembrook wasn't a good egg, because he was. Just a funny type for the Air Service, and years older than any of the rest of us. He looked like a middle-aged, stocky, gray-haired reserve major in an ill-fitting uniform.

"Glad to see you again, Slim, glad to see you," chattered Harrik as he led us down the platform. "I've got my car here, and we'll run right over to the factory and meet Mr. Daw, the president, and you can look over your ships. They're ready to go any time you are, and I have all the instructions. How've you been? Ever see Jim Fawcett any more? Great fellow, Jim."

And so on. It wasn't natural, coming from him, and for some reason or other I caught a whiff of something rotten in the state of Harrik, as it were.

The car he led us to took my breath. It was a Roadley, specially painted and equipped with everything from barrel-lamps to butterfly wind-shields and trunk-racks. I knew it hadn't cost a dime less than four thousand berries as it stood.

"Pretty prosperous for a captain in the Army, Ed," I told him as we started for the factory. "No wonder Congress cuts our pay."

I was with him in the front seat, Don and Hembrook behind. He drove like a wild man and did not answer me, but burst into speech at frequent intervals about some of our old sidekicks. He'd be quiet a moment, as if his mind was a thousand miles away, and then suddenly erupt with some question or statement, as if he had suddenly come to himself. All in all, it was a rather unpleasant surprize for me to see the change in him.

The factory was a big place, built U-shape. Back of it was a square, level flying field of good size. We drove around the immense building—other smaller structures were scattered around two sides of the field—and came in sight of three tremendous ships drawn up in front of three big hangars.

"There are the Tankwings," came the deep, measured tones of Hembrook.

They were a beautiful sight. Of course, paint can cover a multitude of defective pins, and beauty is only varnish-deep. Nevertheless, they looked good. And big, even at that distance.

There were a couple of dozen people around them, divided about half and half between curious sightseers and employees of the factory. A big, broad-shouldered, stalwart-looking man was explaining something about the L. D. 2's to a group of visitors. He had his hat off, and was gesticulating as he talked.

"That's Mr. Daw, talking there," Harrik told me in his quick, nervous way.

"They're beauties, aren't they?" Don was saying to Hembrook.

"They look all right," came the deep bass reply, cautiously and with no enthusiasm.

Hembrook, under great pressure, might have admitted that New York was a fair-sized town.

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The moment Daw spotted us he broke away from the tourists and came over to the car. The mechanics, who were tinkering around the cockpits of the three ships, likewise stopped to look us over.

My first impression of Daw, coming over toward us with his hat off, was that of a big, sleek animal. He was a good six feet, and there was something smooth and powerful about him. His brown hair was parted cleanly and slicked down smoothly to his head. His face had no angles or hollows in it, and yet wasn't what you could call round—a prominent nose swept down from the forehead, and the outline of his jaw was round rather than square. Even his light grayish-green eyes didn't seem to be set far back in his head. His body was like that, too; not fat, but big and smooth and without any sudden surprizes to break the symmetry, so to speak. He was dressed to a T from spats to a chapeau that hadn't cost a cent less than twenty bucks.

"Slim Evans, Mr. Daw," Harrik introduced us. "This is Donald Goodhue, Mr. Daw."

Daw looked me right in the eye and shook with a quick, firm grip that I liked.

"I'm delighted to meet you, Lieutenant Evans, and you too, Goodhue," he said with a smile full of big white teeth.

His voice was just the least bit rasping, and deep, although still an octave or so above Hembrook's bass foghorn.

"Come and look the planes over, gentlemen," he went on. "Believe it or not, nothing in my business career has ever given me the satisfaction that these Tank-wings have. I can't keep away from 'em!"

Oblivious of the onlookers, he led us over to the nearest one of the three. I mentally doffed my plumed helmet to the ships as I got my first close look at one.

It was sort of a cross between a Martin bomber—a twin-motored ship—and the Caproni. The wingspread was about seventy feet, and the wings had the solid, substantial look of the Martin, with great struts between the wings that gave an impression of heavy strength. This look of substantial weight was its principal difference from the light, flimsy look of the usual Caproni, which in general design it closely resembled.

There were three Liberty motors—four hundred and fifty horsepower each—placed exactly as the three two-hundred horsepower motors of the Caproni are. One motor on each wing, held by a complicated maze of struts just far enough from the cockpits to let the propeller revolve. The third motor, with the propeller on the rear of it acting as a pusher, was directly behind the cockpits, and separated from the seats by an eight-foot stretch where two huge gas-tanks were set.

There were two seats for pilot and assistant, about in line with the two front propellers, and ahead of these seats and in the nose of the ship was an observer's and bomber's cockpit. Two fuselages ran back on each side of the rear motor, culminating in a huge horizontal stabilizer which connected the two. There were three rudders and three vertical fins.

The ship was designed to carry a crew of five, and lift two two-thousand-pound bombs or one of those big four-thousand-pound darlings and carry the whole business through the air at better than one hundred miles per hour. The landing gear struts were like tree-trunks, and the pneumatic tires were big enough for me to crawl through. The ships, flashing and gleaming in the sunlight, seemed like monsters crouched for a spring into the air.

There were a dozen technical points we approved: the low landing-gear which would make it hard to turn the ship over on its back in landing; the position of throttle and spark levers, the comfort of the seats and their position in relation to rudder-bar and wheel, the bombracks underneath, and the design of the two tiny cockpits, one in each section of the double-fuselage, where the crew would ride.

We were a curiously silent group as we looked them over. Finally Goodhue got out his cigaret-holder, inserted a cigaret therein, and gave his opinion.

"They're the *ne plus ultra*, the *sine qua non*, the cop's nightstick and the answer to an airman's prayer," he said. "But listen to me, brethren. In a few years ships like ocean liners'll be buzzing through the ozone, carrying a captain and crew and as exciting and sensitive as a ferry-boat. Slim, look at these crates with your good eye, and bow down to 'em as forecasting the day when a flyer'll be a chauffeur."

I had the same dim idea in the back of my mind. Crab about the flying game as we will, there never has been and never will be anything to stand beside it. To be ten

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thousand feet high, with the universe for a play ground and a little linen-and-wood kite under you that answers like a shot if you breathe on the stick; that knows no practical limitations of space or speed or position; that'll dive and buck and loop and spin in answer to your wish and always have within it the spice of possible death; the days of these little single-seated pets were going, and with it the game that broke us and smashed us and made us love it. Sentimental? Did you ever play around a mountain range of clouds at a hundred miles an hour or hang on your back and look up at the earth?

I've cut my eye-teeth, and all that, and I'm not prone to excessive enthusiasm, but I know that a man's never wrung the last drop of experience out of life until he's ridden a trim little feather-like ship that rolls and twists through the air like a live thing frolicking, with the airblast and the propeller wash hitting his face and sweeping all other sensation from him and a two or three or four hundred horsepower motor singing along ahead. I can take most of my teeth out and put 'em back in again, my left shoulder isn't worth a damn and I have but few bones which haven't been cracked here and there, and yet I could stand beside those big ships and hate 'em while I admired 'em because they were going to help along the time when aerial lumberwagons carried the food to market every morning.

Daw's voice brought me out of my foolish reverie.

"Permission for me to make the trip as far as Louisville and take the mechanics along came today, Harrik," he was saying in his suavely forceful way.

"What's that?" I put in. "You going with us?"

"Right you are, lieutenant. Hope you don't object. I asked the War Department for permission, for two reasons: one is that I want to see for myself how our handiwork performs, and give two of our best mechanics the same opportunity. The other is that Louisville is where I was born, and I'm going there anyway to see the Derby."

"Mr. Daw," said I, "You are a man after my own heart. I'd rather hear a seventy-five thousand Derby crowd yelp 'they're off' and then watch Morvich carry fifty bucks of mine or so around that track than anything I can call to mind. Goodhue and I have been laying deep-laid plots to take it in ever since we thought about it."

"You talk like a Kentuckian," said Daw.

We forgot about ships for a while to talk horses. The more I saw of the big, easy-moving Daw the better I liked him. I was aware all the time, however, of Harrik's attitude. We all sat around Daw's private office, and Harrik was like some rattling skeleton at the feast. Hembrook listened disapprovingly while Don and I and Daw forgot business for a chinfest.

It was four o'clock when we got around to the business at hand, having decided that we'd go into New York for a show that evening as Daw's guests. We were all three to stay at Harrik's house, it seemed, and Daw was to have dinner with us there.

It didn't take long to get details settled. The ships would have a final test by the company's test pilot on the morrow, and barring accidents be ready to go the day after. Three Army mechanics would be in from Langham Field to make the trip, arriving that night. Our route as laid out by the Chief was New York to Boundville, West Virginia, from there to Louisville, where we would land at the municipal field instead of the Army airdrome, Goddard Field being nothing but a transformed cow-pasture on the side of a hill. Then Park Field, at Memphis, and Little Rock, Dallas, San Antone and Houston.

It was Harrik who told us all this, walking up and down the office constantly and gesticulating nervously. When his glittering eyes met mine, as they did occasionally, I was really uncomfortable. It was a puzzling, discomforting change from the quiet, repressed, absent-minded engineering expert I had known as a cadet.

III

PERHAPS the car Harrik had exhibited to my astonished eyes ought to have prepared me for the house, but it didn't. Eelyville was a common or garden variety of suburban town, with the airplane factory its only industry and the population made up largely of commuters. There were a number of nice homes along the wide, well-paved boulevard that we followed. Daw wasn't along—he'd gone home to dress for the evening. Harrik, driving fast, followed this boulevard out to the edge of town.

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Ahead of us was a good-looking house, set in a large expanse of lawn well back from the street, which changed into a country road a little farther on. I was half-prepared for his turning the car into the driveway, because I could see no other domicile he might inhabit. But it was a mighty elaborate-looking house for an Army captain who was pulling down a trifle less than four hundred dollars a month, with flying pay.

"Probably married money," I remember thinking. "Nice home, Ed," I said aloud. I was in the front seat with him.

"Huh? Oh, yes. Pretty nice. Verna likes it," he said. "You never met my wife, did you? No, of course not—didn't get married until a year after I saw you—only life, Slim——"

I was certain that his wife's money was paying for things when we met her. She was tall, and when I saw her I got an idea of what "svelte" means for the first time.

She was blonde, with a flower-like skin and a pair of cold gray eyes that looked me up and down as if wondering who had brought this loose-jointed rube into her house. She drawled an affected "How d'you do-o-o? Delighted, I'm shuah," and gave me a condescending hand. Don, being of a more refined and civilized type of beauty, got away a little better.

"Give me your checks and I'll see that your baggage gets up," said Harrik. "And I'll show you to your rooms right now. You and Don will have to bunk together, Slim."

"Perfectly all right, Ed," I told him.

The house was as fine inside as it was out, and I caught a glimpse of a negro butler and a maid. Hembrook, as usual, acted as if he was in a state of complete disapproval of everything and everybody. Two or three times I caught his speculative, solemn gaze resting steadily on Harrik, as if he, too, sensed that something was wrong.

During dinner, for which occasion Don and I had climbed into dinner coats, it was Daw who made the meal endurable. Not that it wasn't a good meal, for it was. But Mrs. Harrik, and Daw as well, were evidently worried about Ed. He drank too much before the meal, and alternated staccato conversation with moody silence during it. Daw, big and sleek and perfectly at ease, talked entertainingly and exchanged occasional meaning looks with Mrs. Harrik when her husband was in one of his silent fits, staring broodingly at his plate.

We had announced that we were bound for town for the theater that evening, had invited our host and hostess and had our invitations turned down, and hence it had been decided that Goodhue and Daw and I were to go in Daw's car. After dinner Hembrook pulled a surprize. He cleared his throat, as usual, before allowing his resonant tones to roll forth to an expectant world.

"Did I understand that no—er—young ladies were to be included in the—er—evening?" he inquired.

The five men were smoking on the veranda. Mrs. Harrik had not yet come out.

"Right you are, Hembrook," I told him. "It's too late to secure the proper grade of food-pup without straining the resources of our friend Mr. Daw too severely."

"Then if you don't mind I'd like to join you," announced Hembrook. "When I—er—declined I was under the impression——"

"That you'd have to put up with some gold-plated chow-canine," I finished for him.

"Delighted, lieutenant," said Daw. "And it is getting along toward seven-thirty, so let's go. The tickets are waiting for us, and it'll be easy to get another."

We saw the girliest show in town, and later, being hungry, fell for one of these Broadway gyp joints. Daw, I noticed, knew the headwaiter and was treated with much respect. The more I saw of him the more I was inclined to like him. As near as I could figure it he had been a sort of business soldier of fortune, if you get what I mean. He knew the oil-fields, had dabbled with a mine in Mexico, and various other things. He seemed to be a young forty, and apparently enjoyed life to the hilt. And there was force and power obvious in him—always utterly sure of himself, and looking and acting like a million dollars. We did not refer to Captain Harrik, except by innuendo. It was an unpleasant subject, and we let it alone.

The evening was made remarkable by the humanizing of Aloysius T. Hembrook. Daw got some Scotch at this cabaret, and in two drinks our dignified brother owned the world. Honestly, I pretty near forgot myself and called him Al!

He insisted on taking a slight stroll down Fifth Avenue. Being a firm believer in the power of exercise in the open air to clean

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the cobwebs of bootleg-liquor from the head, I gave my consent and Daw had no objection. Passing the Public Library Aloysius T. was certain that he had seen one of the stone lions in the front move. In answer to our arguments against this phenomenon he stopped and launched into a long oration.

It appeared that one of the principal ambitions of his life had been to be a big-game hunter. Was he, a man who had it in him to slay roaring elephants, bellowing pythons and ferocious anteaters, to allow a library lion to wink at him without reprisal? Certainly not. We finally allowed him to inspect the sculptured beast at close range, eyed by an interested policeman.

When Daw let us out of the car at Harrik's house we were an exalted trio. Daw said a cherry good night and slipped away down the drive while we sneaked in quietly. There was a light in Harrik's den, the rear room of the house on the right hand side. I went down the hall on the chance that Harrik was still up, followed by the other two on tiptoe.

The door from the hall into the study was unlatched, and I opened it and looked in. Harrik was seated at his desk, head in his hands. The only light was shed directly on the desk by a small reading lamp.

He did not answer when I spoke. We all went into the room and I shook him. He jumped about a foot, and the eyes of a wild man burned into mine as he awoke. He sank back with a sigh.

"You scared me, Slim. Excuse me. Where's Daw?"

"He's gone home. Why?" I answered.

"I was waiting up to see him. Got to see him. Tonight. I'll go now. He doesn't live far from here."

"Why not wait till morning?" inquired Goodhue.

Hembrook, as sober as a judge now, was watching, as usual. His eyes never left the sallow, lined face of the engineer. He had taken his glasses off, and I'll tell you that the look in those sunken eyes was enough to give anybody the creeps.

Harrik swept his hand across his forehead as though trying to collect himself. He was still in evening dress, pitifully correct and immaculate. I say "pitifully" because I had known him so well three years before. It was an artificial Harrik I was looking at.

"What did you say, lieutenant?" he asked, coming to himself with a start.

"Why not wait until the cheery morn?" repeated Goodhue.

Harrik hesitated.

"Because I—I—I must see him tonight!"

"I'll go with you, Ed," I said.

"No, no, Slim. Thanks, but there's no need——"

"I care not for needs," I told him. "Just for sociability——"

"I'm going alone. It's private. And I'm going now! Go to bed, boys. Don't get excited." He smiled almost like the old, impractical, easy-going cuss I knew. "I've got something on my mind, and when I get it off I'll be able to sleep and be myself again. Just business——"

He rambled on. It ended by our going to bed and his going out.

"Is your friend cuckoo or not?" whispered Goodhue as we went up the stairs.

I heard some one clearing his throat, and knew that Hembrook was winding up for purposes of speech.

"There is—er—something very peculiar about the captain, and possibly I—er—might suggest one or two things," said Aloysius. "I'd like to talk to you about them sometime."

We were at the door of the room Goodhue and I were to occupy, right at the head of the stairs.

"Good night," said Hembrook in measured tones, and stalked off down the hall, trying to walk tiptoe and succeeding in making slightly less noise than a regiment of cavalry.

DESPITE Harrik and the surmises and speculations he filled me with, I was sleepy and wasted none of the remaining hours of rest. That is, until exactly three o'clock by my handsome two-dollar wristwatch. It was at that hour that I found myself wide awake, and listening to low noises coming from downstairs. Don was sleeping like a baby in the other bed.

Naturally, I thought it was Harrik. I listened for fully ten minutes. The noise came from his den, office, or whatever he called it. I could hear the rustle of papers occasionally, and a continuous series of very light footfalls—so light that I couldn't swear they were footfalls.

Finally I decided to cock a snook at the *status quo*, so to speak. If it was Harrik, maybe I could be of some service. In the shape he was in an old friend might be of

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use at almost any moment. If it was not he, an extra hand in whatever game was on foot was a highly commendable idea.

I slipped on trousers and sneaked out to the head of the stairs. Then I saw that the front door was ajar. It was dark as pitch, but there was a dim line of light where the door was opened an inch or two. I wasn't certain, but I thought I heard the tiny purr of an idling automobile motor.

I figured that probably Daw and Harrik had driven back in Daw's car. Nevertheless, while not feeling called on to butt in yet a while, I stayed and listened. From down the hall came the dulcet snores of Aloysius T. Hembrook. His vocal range when asleep was less restricted than in his conscious moments, for he seemed equally adept on both tenor and bass notes.

Suddenly I heard whispers, and then footsteps coming out into the hall. They had turned the light off, evidently, for the opening of the study door did not lighten the absolute blackness of the hall below. I saw a black shape loom against the front door, and my hand found the switch at the head of the stairs.

"That you, Ed?" I said suddenly.

I heard a startled grunt, and sudden noise. Like a fool, I switched on the light.

At the foot of the stairs were three men, all masked. For a second they looked at me, standing there at the head of the stairs, and then the leader threw the door wide. That instant I got my loose-jointed chassis into action.

I let out a hoarse hoot for help to awaken Goodhue and launched myself into thin air. I never touched a step, but I lit on the two men who had not got out the door. I hit 'em like a ton of brick, but as they went to the floor I realized that the brick had been jarred worse than what it hit. I grappled weakly with one of them, for I had no breath whatever. For a second it seemed that I was on top and might hold them. I got a wicked kick on the shin, and then a blow behind the ear that stunned me.

"Coming, Slim—hold 'em!" yelped Goodhue, a laugh in his voice.

Just as I heard the thud on the stairs as he leaped down something hit me from behind, and I was compelled to leave a good fight behind in a wild burst of shooting stars.

When I came to I thought I was under Niagara Falls. I was still lying on the floor of the reception hall, and Hembrook had thrown a cupful of water in my face. I sat up, and took in the scene. Goodhue, a wry grin on his face, was propped against the wall. Mrs. Harrik, calm and cool, was holding a kimono about her, standing on the stairs. Friend Aloysius was kneeling beside me, aiming another cup of water. He was in full uniform, as usual. No mere burglary would make him forget his blouse. I'll swear his gray hair was combed.

He smiled conservatively.

"What happened?" he asked, and Mrs. Harrik, like an echo, drawled:

"Of all funny things. What was it, lieutenant?"

I looked around, and then at the still dizzy Goodhue.

"We didn't bag one of 'em, eh?" I asked, and he shook his head.

"One of 'em was out for the count, but they took him off, I guess. I ran into a fist head-on after I'd got in two good licks."

I told Mrs. Harrik and Hembrook what had taken place. They had arrived on the scene just too late to see anything. Hembrook telephoned the police, and we started in to inventory possessions. The servants did not sleep in the house, it seemed, and Harrik was not yet back. I never stopped to think of how queer that was, but his high-toned spouse did not seem curious and I guess we all forgot the circumstance in the interest of inventorying.

"They seemed to be in the captain's den while I heard them," I reminded the others, so we started there.

"It's peculiar—there is nothing of value there," said Mrs. Harrik as we went in.

"And even more peculiar is the fact that I didn't notice any bag of loot when I saw them on their way out," I said.

The desk drawers had been pulled out, and their contents were strewn on the floor. The three sections of the filing cabinet had likewise been outraged—papers covered the floor like a stage snow-storm.

In the dining-room Don, now fully recovered from his recent imbroglio, spotted a bag beside the buffet. It proved to be full of silver. A hasty count showed that it was all there, however. Hembrook did the counting. So far he had said nothing, as was his usual custom.

Don and I, with Mrs. Harrik's permission, took a cigaret apiece from the box on

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the table and lit up. We were both arrayed chastely in trousers and pajama coats.

"This bag of silver may be on the level, but it looks to me like a blind," I told the assembled company. "What were the robbers going through Ed's papers for? And if it was silver they were really after, like ordinary burglars, why did they leave it behind?"

"Might have heard you up-stairs," suggested Don.

I was positive they had not.

"They weren't in any hurry until I switched on the light. Looks to me as if they were after some papers of some kind and figured on taking the silver as a blind. Got it ready and then forgot it, being a very unimportant part of their swag. And I know they weren't carrying anything when they went out—anything obvious, that is. Mrs. Harrik, do you know of any papers in Ed's possession that any one might want?"

The fair lady had regained her accent, which she had temporarily lost in the shuffle.

"I know nothing of my husband's personal or official affairs," she drawled. "Excuse me for a few moments, please. I suppose the police will be heah at any moment."

She went upstairs, and Aloysius joined the conversation.

"It seems to me—er—strange that the captain is not home," he said portentously. "And the—er—coincidence——"

"You've said a libraryful—maybe," I complimented him. "He said he was going over to see Daw on very important business that he wanted to get off his mind——"

Hembrook's square, somewhat bovine countenance showed sudden interest, and he was going through the coughing and gurgling incident to speech when the doorbell split the silence. I opened the door, and in walked a couple of policemen in uniform. I did the honors and told the story. Mrs. Harrik, more fully dressed, descended in a moment and became a disdainful onlooker. You'd have thought I was the owner of the house and that she was entirely uninterested.

One of the cops, a sergeant with a walrus mustache, seized on the fact of Harrik's absence.

"Call up Mr. Daw's place," he ordered the other man, "and see what's what. Looks funny. Yuh say, all of yuh, that there ain't no private papers yuh know of, nor nothin' Mr. Harrik's been into them crooks would want? Leavin' silver an' goin' through desks and filin' cabinets——"

"Of course Captain Harrik is an Army officer, in the engineering end of the Air Service, and might possibly have some technical papers or plans that some one might want, but the idea is far-fetched, in my opinion. Perhaps he can shed light on it when he comes."

Neither Don, Hembrook nor myself had mentioned anything peculiar in Harrik's actions when he insisted on going to see Daw. The sergeant told us that the net was out all around for the three criminals, and they'd probably be caught. He muttered to himself as he poked about, evidently finding the whole thing beyond his powers of conversation. Had there been any thing stolen it would have been different—that is, anything tangible. Of course, we could not tell whether or not any papers were missing.

We could hear the other minion of the law bellowing into the phone, which was in the up-stairs hall. In a moment his heavy tread pounded down the stairs.

"Mr. Daw says that Captain Harrik ain't been to his house tonight, and that he ain't seen nothin' of him."

The burly sergeant, wiggling his mustache with excitement, turned to me.

"What time'd he leave here?" he demanded.

"About one-thirty," I told him, and Don nodded agreement.

"Did he take his car?"

"We left the car down-town to be washed," Mrs. Harrik cut in, showing no signs of excitement.

"There's a path cuttin' across to the factory from here; would he take that?"

We all looked at Mrs. Harrik. She was standing beside the table, seemingly immune to the growing tension in the room.

"Yes, I think so," she drawled. "Deah me, I hope——"

But the sergeant had little or no time for what she hoped.

"Take that path to the Daw factory and foller it close, and see what yuh can see. Daw lives close to the factory—you know that little white bungalow next to Sears'. If you can't see no signs of Harrik come back an' tell me. I'll snoop a little and keep in touch with the station."

Mike departed for his walk. Hembrook volunteered the information that the path

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referred to cut across some fields and through a little strip of woodland to the factory, cutting off nearly a half mile from the route through town. The factory was on the eastern edge of town, the house on the northern outskirts.

Don, Hembrook and I, with the sergeant's grudging permission, arranged the papers as best we might as soon as the cop had examined them. We did not mention Harrik, except in general terms, but I knew that both Hembrook and Goodhue were thinking and wondering and trying to assure themselves that all was well. Mrs. Harrik was uncanny in her calm. From my observation of the couple at dinner I had pretty well made up what I jokingly call my mind to the fact that Ed Harrik worshipped the ground his good-looking *frau* walked on, but that she was easily able to contain her enthusiasm about him. Even so, a disappearing husband might be expected to have some slight effect on her. Outside of walking around a bit nervously, she seemed absolutely normal in every respect.

Dawn had passed and it was light when we heard heavy footsteps on the veranda. The sergeant, Mrs. Harrik and the three representatives of the Air Service were all in the ransacked room, and instinctively we stopped work and waited.

Without ringing the bell the man came in, and the next second Mike was filling the doorway. His red face was redder, and he was panting like a horse with the heaves.

"I found Cap'n Harrik layin' in th' woods between here an' the Greeley factory, dead's a door-nail, with a bullet-hole in 'is temple and a Colt automatic in his hand, sor!"

IV

CURIOUSLY enough, I felt little surprized. It seemed as if the vague shadow which I had sensed hanging over Harrik had finally engulfed him, and that I had expected it. I hadn't, really, of course. And yet after it happened it seemed that I had—as if what had happened was inevitable.

The instant of silence after Mike's announcement, and the tableau in that room was etched on my strangely tranquil brain, never to be erased. Mrs. Harrik was gripping the table, swaying slightly. The sergeant stood with hands on his broad hips, his mustache puffed out and his eyes popping. Don's tanned face seemed suddenly older, eyes narrowed and mouth tight. Strangest of all was Hembrook. Those round blue eyes of his were blazing, as if somewhere in his stocky, pudgy body a flame had leaped up and was shining from his eyes.

Then the sergeant sprang forward.

"Stay b'th'body," he rasped, and tore like a bull for the telephone.

I got to Mrs. Harrik's side an instant ahead of Don. Fearful shrieks rent the air as she collapsed. I caught her. Her face was stony and composed, apparently, and her screams were lifeless, mechanical. And for that reason they were the most blood-curdling things I've ever listened to.

I picked her up and carried her up-stairs, Don behind me. All the while those measured, terrible screams. Not a tear, not a contortion of that lovely face—it seemed that she had suddenly gone mad.

I'm no medical authority, and my methods are rough and ready. I laid her on the disordered bed in her room, and then took her by the shoulders and shook her.

"Shut up!" I roared in her face.

I had heard that firmness was the way to combat hysteria, and I sure shot the works when I tried. It was a hard thing to do, but it worked. Those screams stopped as if I'd gagged her with my hand. She looked at me with eyes that seemed to see nothing. Her mouth opened, as if to scream again, and once more I shook her and ordered her to be still. Then came a tempest of weeping, and she writhed and twisted on the bed, but I thought crying would do her good.

"Have you any friend you'd like us to call, Mrs. Harrik?" I asked her, and she shook her head.

I never saw a woman cry so, and like most men even one tear is worse for me to take than a bullet. We went out, Don and I, for the simple reason that we didn't know what else to do.

"Here comes a car," announced Goodhue as we went down the stairs.

I hadn't heard it, but in a moment Daw's car stopped with grinding brakes, and he burst into the hall.

"What's this about Harrik coming to see me last night? Where is he?" he asked crisply.

"He's dead—shot himself, apparently," I told him.

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"What?"

It was like a bark, the way he said that word. His eyes widened, and he stopped in the act of taking off his cap holding it lifted above his head as if doing an imitation of a statue.

"Good mornin', Mr. Daw."

It was the sergeant. He came out of the drawing room door with Hembrook.

"Tell me all that happened—wait a minute. How's Mrs. Harrik?" he said rapidly, ignoring the policeman.

He had regained his momentarily lost composure, and was his poised forceful self again.

"She's in a bad way," Don answered him. 'If we could get hold of some woman——"

"I'll call Mrs. Brent. They're very friendly."

He went up the stairs two at a time. He weighed a hundred and ninety if he did a pound, but he bounded up there as light as a kitten. He returned in less than a minute.

"She'll be over as soon as she dresses," he said briefly. "Now, what happened?"

I told him, with frequent interlineations, interruptions and surmises from the sergeant. Daw paced up and down the drawing-room like a caged panther, continuing his tramp while answering the sergeant's respectful questions. Daw, as the head of the Greeley factory, was to be handled with gloves even by a policeman.

He had nothing to tell. He had gone home and gone to bed. He was a bachelor, living alone except for a Chinese servant. There had been no message given him from Harrik on his return, and his servant had remained up until he got home. He had not seen Harrik at all, and could give absolutely no reason for Harrik's sudden desire to see him. He and Harrik had grown to be close friends, but had had no business relationships at all except for Harrik's official position as Government inspector and adviser at the factory.

"He was the salt of the earth, and I'd give a thousand dollars to know what's been bothering him lately, and what the true explanation of the—the tragedy is!" he declared, walking ceaselessly up and down. "I can't believe it was a financial emergency. I think he would have come to me for help before doing anything extreme. It may be the robbery and the—murder are linked. Sergeant, I'd like to offer a reward of a thousand dollars for the apprehension of those three robbers!"

THEN came the additional forces of the law, bringing with them Harrik's body. Then Mrs. Brent, and newspapermen. A flood of 'em. Later in the day, after Don Goodhue had wired the War Department, an Army board of three majors blew in from Mineola.

For two days there was questioning, cross-questioning, and much running about. And nothing found out.

First of all, the three robbers had disappeared completely. There was not a clue. They might have been in a car, of course, but that possibility had been thought of and there was a wide-spread dragnet. Eelyville was gone over with a fine-tooth comb, and every stranger in town questioned. A careful search for fingerprints or other clues came to nothing.

The coroner's jury brought in a verdict of suicide, with which the Army Board disagreed. The medical major on the board swore up and down that there was scant possibility of a man's shooting himself with the gun held at the angle indicated by the downward path of the bullet. The coroner agreed that it was unlikely, but on the other hand, the gun had been proven to be Harrik's own Colt .45. Of course, we all had to testify to his scrambled mental condition, too. Daw's Chinese servant stated positively that Harrik had not been in or near the house that night, and no witness came to light who had even seen him.

This was not particularly important, because the path to the factory was several hundred yards from any house for its entire distance. No one had heard a shot, either. I couldn't blame the coroner for the verdict—it looked pretty nearly open and shut. And yet, having known Harrik fairly well in the old days, I was positive that he had not walked out there to the woods and shot himself. If he had, I was convinced that something had happened out there to drive him to it.

Investigation of his affairs brought out the fact that he had no particularly private papers that anybody knew about. Certainly nothing to tempt robbers. His financial affairs provided a bit of mystery—his bank account showed that he had deposited ten thousand dollars in addition to his Army

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pay within the last six months, in varying amounts. He had told the bank he had been playing the market. Investigation in New York failed to bring to light any brokerage house who had any such customer.

His wife said that he had spoken vaguely of the market two or three times, and Daw corroborated it. Neither of them knew anything more—he had not gone into detail. At the time of his death he had two hundred dollars in the bank, something over three hundred dollars worth of debts, and an undeposited check for his month's pay. Of course every one knew he had been living way beyond his army income, and if the market had gone back on him finances might have been worrying him a little, but there was nothing serious. He had a fully paid-for car worth nearly three thousand second-hand, and with a little retrenchment in living would have been all right.

The authorities, despite the provisional verdict of the coroner, indicated that they were going to keep after the case through the medium of the three robbers. The Army was likewise determined to do a little low and lofty ferreting about.

Our projected junket across the country got quite a send-off, so to speak. Otherwise ordinary New York papers were made notable for a couple of days by our pictures, and flaring headlines announced to a breathless world that the dead man's fellow flyers did not believe he had committed suicide, that Daw "instinctively scouted the idea" despite the evidence, and so forth.

Things were at this pass when I got orders to act as official escort of the body, taking it back to Grayley, Illinois, where Harrik came from. Don and Hembrook were to wait at Eelyville, and we were to start our tour together as soon as I returned.

Hembrook's attitude during those hectic days was peculiar. He stalked around, solemn and precise as always. You'd always give Aloysius credit for knowing more about anything than he let on he did, but in this particular case the feeling on my part—and Goodhue agreed with me—was particularly strong. But he wouldn't say a word. Just puttered about, smiled mysteriously, became the handy man about the house, and seemed to be biding his time. I knew that until he was absolutely positive he knew something, and was entirely ready to make a move, he couldn't be coaxed nor kicked into sharing his profound theories.

To my surprize, I found out that Mrs. Harrik originated in the same town as Ed, and of course we made the trip together. After her first outburst, quashed so positively by my loose-jointed self, she had become entirely collected and calm, keeping to her room most of the time, but appearing when necessary and showing no signs of heart-rending wo.

The trip took four days, total—I had a lot of arrangements to make for the funeral. Of course, there was nothing pleasant in it. Mrs. Harrik and I talked little on the way out to Grayleyville. I simply didn't cotton to her—she was good-looking and worth the tribute of a deferential leer from any man, but it stopped there. Harrik had no living relatives, and I attended to all details for the funeral. Some of the boys flew over from Dayton and dropped flowers on the grave, and a company of infantry from Indianapolis acted as escort and fired a salute over the grave. Then taps with the echo bugles—that old Army custom which is the most beautiful in the world, I think, and for that reason tears your heart out if it's one of your friends who's being lowered into the grave.

There were few mourners for Harrik—the town knew him but slightly. Mrs. Harrik and I, you might say, were the only real ones. As the notes of the last bugle, far away behind a hill, died away I had decided that if it was in my poor power to bring to light the reasons for my friend's death it should be done.

On the trip back to Eelyville I had much to think about, and my mind was running wide open. I had fully decided to get a leave, if necessary, after the completion of the trip and come back to Eelyville to poke around. My stay in Grayley had added one more bit of mental fodder, for I found that Mrs. Harrik came from a poor family and had not brought Ed a cent. For her he had undoubtedly slaved and gambled to get money. How he had done it, and its connection with his suicide—or murder—I was determined to find out.

Of course I had to land one L. D. 2 in Houston, Texas, first. Which proved to be some job, gentlemen—some job.

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V

DON met me at the train in Eelyville.

"Aloysius T. is infesting the factory with his presence, as usual," he told me. "He's just about run Daw into a premature grave. We're both staying at Daw's house, now."

"Don't he and Hembrook get along?" I enquired as we entered the taxi Goodhue had chartered.

"Aloysius asks too many questions. He's having a —— of a time with knowledge. As near as I can find out, he's been trying to catch up with the Encyclopedia ever since he was born, and is gaining ground all the time. He thinks this is a good chance to find out all the facts there are in the construction of airplanes, and he isn't bashful."

"What've you been up to?"

His tanned face wrinkled in a seraphic grin and he sighed reminiscently.

"I have been making up for twenty-five years' ignorance of New York in four days," he stated.

Which I believed without reservations. Don is a ribald youth.

"Anything new?"

"About Captain Harrik, you mean? Not a thing. The crooks got away slick and clean, apparently, and the bulls haven't uncovered a thing. I'm afraid it was just a coincidence, Slim, and that he got sick of things and decided to chuck it. Looks that way."

"It's looked a bit more like it to me since I found out that his wife didn't have anything but expensive tastes, and they were sort of a balance for her previous existence. Her father keeps a small grocery in Harrik's home town. But I knew Harrik, and I don't believe he walked out of the house that night for the purpose of shooting himself, and as I think back at it, I don't believe he had a gun on him when he went out!"

Don thought this over. It had occurred to me on the train. Of course he might have had one in his pocket, but a Colt .45 is a big weapon, and as I tried to visualize Harrik in detail as he had left the house I could remember no bulge anywhere.

"I believe you're right, Slim," Goodhue admitted finally. "I never thought of it."

"The day I land in Houston, if ever, is the day I either get the Intelligence detail I've asked for, or the day I apply for leave to snoot about," I announced as we drove up to the factory. "I hate to be picked as a sucker, and Harrik was my friend."

We went up to Daw's office, were shown in without delay, and found Hembrook there, waiting. Daw, in light tweeds and looking as if he'd just stepped out of a bathtub, greeted me cordially and then said:

"We're all anxious to start tomorrow, Evans. Suit you?"

"To a T."

"Your three mechanics are here and the two men that are going from the factory, besides myself, are showing them the fine points. I've decided to take Ralph Hanson, our test pilot, along as one of our mechanics. He's a mechanical genius, besides being an old friend of mine. He can take a trick at the controls for somebody once in a while, too, although I don't suppose we'll be trying to break any speed record, will we?"

"Not as far as I'm concerned."

"Well, you're the doctor, you know," Daw informed me with that flashing smile of his. "We looked up the Army Register, and you're senior, and as such the C. O. of the trip."

I'd never thought of that slight detail at all.

"I'll try to struggle along under my weight of responsibility," I informed them. "I presume I'll have a —— of a lot of trouble keeping Hembrook here from cutting up high jinks in every town we strike,"

Hembrook labored and brought forth a laugh, in this wise:

"Gr-umph! Haw. Haw. Haw."

Each haw dropped like a note from a fog-horn.

"My idea is this," I went on after Aloysius had ceased his hilarious cachinations. "Three or four hours behind the wheel of one of these Tankwings is going to be sufficient. We'll make one lap a day, and that'll leave the mechanics plenty of time to keep the ships in shape. If there's any way under heaven we can make the Derby we will. This is the tenth—we'll make Boundville tomorrow, and Louisville the twelfth. I see no reason why we can't wait over a day, and see the Derby Saturday. Then we'll fly on Sunday instead of laying off, making our schedule up that way. Inasmuch as I'm leading buckaroo

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of this gang, I'll call on all hands and the ship's cook to be ready to start every morning at 6 A.M. so we'll make our next place before noon. That'll give plenty of leeway for unexpected hold-ups and for mechanical trouble."

"Another thing, Lieutenant," said Daw. "My men and myself are going to wear parachutes—regular U. S. Irving type. If you Army men want any, we have some extra ones——"

Hembrook was the only one who accepted the offer. A parachute on the back makes uncomfortable riding, because it keeps the pilot from leaning back in his seat. One has to be hunched forward all the while. And a pilot won't leave his ship, anyway, unless it actually is afire or a wing drops off or something like that. Ninety-nine and four-tenths per cent. of flyers are killed by something that happens on the ground or within a hundred feet of it.

My luggage was at Daw's bungalow, where we all three spent the night. His Chink servant was an old, silent fellow who could and did do everything for Daw, from cooking and serving meals to shining his shoes. He never said a word while we were there.

We talked a great deal about Harrik, and all of us had the idea in our minds that the robbery and Harrik's death had some connection. While our better judgment and every rule of logic pointed to suicide, it seemed that we all instinctively scouted the idea. I found that Daw had hired a private detective who was snooping around without any result thus far, and that his thousand dollar reward was still standing.

I grew to like him right well—he was one of the most interesting talkers I ever heard spout. Most men are interesting when they talk about something with which they are thoroughly familiar, and very boresome when they talk about anything else. Get 'em on general subjects and you've heard or read all they've got to say several times before. Daw had a keen, hard mind and he'd been around. I'll say he had. Swung a pick in a mine when he was eighteen, and owned a bigger mine when he was twenty-five, lost his money, made another batch in the oil-fields, sunk that, and went to Mexico and gathered a third wad. He pretty nearly lost that in this airplane business, he didn't mind telling us.

"I figured flying the coming thing, and when I heard Greeley was ready to sell out a couple of years ago and that this Government contract for the L. D. 2s was coming up I organized a company, put all my own money in, and sailed in. But I nearly came a cropper, and I'm not out of the woods yet," he told us. "This contract will fix me up, though. We built the first ship—the one you'll fly, Lieutenant Evans, inasmuch as it's the number one ship—and built it for cost. That is, thought we did. I lost money on it. The Government tried it out and liked it. I knew we'd have to bid right down to the bone to get the big contract, with the Sparrow people and the rest in on it, and believe me we did. I don't figure we'll make a dime on the whole thing, but it meant that we could keep the factory busy and our men paid for a couple of years. I was fooled on the business—but I'm not going to stay fooled. Sooner or later this Government is going to realize that they've got to take aviation by the horns, for their commercial development and for their own military safety. It'll be like the automobile business, and if I can hang on till then I'm going to."

Sitting in his chair there, big and healthy and smiling, you believed him, and I liked his attitude. I was puzzled at the friction between him and Hembrook. Aloysius was sitting and looking on, as usual, as if figuring and wondering and trying to catch somebody. It was plain that he and Daw disliked each other, although our host went out of his way to cover it up. But then, Hembrook did get on the nerves of a lot of people. They might have clashed on any number of personal matters, or perhaps Hembrook had been a nuisance around the factory. He had probably been asking questions and bothering everybody for days, and undoubtedly arguing a lot of points that weren't clear in his own single-track mind.

He rubbed my fur the wrong way, too. I'd tried to pry out of him any item of information whereon he had based his mysterious hints to me that all was not well, and I got nowhere. He'd confide in me when he got good and ready, and that meant that he'd have to have incontrovertible evidence. He'd get it without help, too, and in his own sweet way.

"I was—er—a trifle hasty when I suggested that—er—we talk it over, as I have—er—really nothing but—er—the slightest

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evidence to—er—" he said when I buttonholed him, and I interrupted:

"Well, spill it! I'd like to know——"

"It would not be advisable now," he told me. "It would perhaps be—er—unjust."

And that was every bit of that. So I couldn't blame Daw when I saw how little use he had for my gray-headed pilot. He sat all evening, listened, said little or nothing, and turned in at ten o'clock. The rest of us followed around eleven, having spent the latter part of the hour learning about Louisville from Daw. It was a likely village, according to him, and from what little I'd seen of him I thought he ought to know.

VI

6 A.M. found us at the Greeley Field, and our mechanics were awaiting us, as well as this fellow Hanson and the two other men from the Greeley factory. Of course I knew Hanson by reputation—he started flying about as soon as Langley did, seems to me. He'd been a civilian, instructor in the Army during the early days, and had been test pilot for the Greeleys before Daw and his bunch took hold. He was a short, stocky fellow with a dark, rather sullen face, bold black eyes, and a wide, tight mouth that had two permanent creases around it. His head was a trifle oversized for the rather thin, wiry body that held it up. When he shook hands with me his eyes sort of bored into mine, and I got the funny idea that he was laughing inside—just the expression I seemed to catch in those prominent eyes of his.

The other two Greeley men seemed ordinary enough. They were in coveralls, and both had parachutes strapped to their backs. The Government had sent us three sergeants. My man was a roly-poly, blond fellow named O'Flynn, who had a round, freckled face, gray eyes, and a nice Irish smile.

The Tankwings bulked on the line like small lighthouses, ready for the warm-up and r'aring to go. The sergeants, assisted by the Greeley mechanics, stowed our luggage in the proper ships. I was to fly number one, Don number two, and Hembrook the third one. I noticed briefly that Bayzi, a Greeley man with powerful shoulders and arms like a gorilla, had lifted my two very heavy suitcases in one hand and swung them up to O'Flynn, in the cockpit above his head, as easily as if they'd been feathers.

At my request everybody gathered in a group for some last instructions before starting. A good many automobiles were rolling into the field to watch the start, and some newspaper photographers were on the ground. I told the reporters gently but firmly that we were in a —— of a hurry and that we'd previously told 'em all the dope.

"Just a couple of things before we take off," I told the bunch after they'd gathered. "First, how we ride. I'm in one, and Mr. Daw will ride with me, he says. Lieutenant Goodhue is in two, and Lieutenant Hembrook in three. You two Greeley men can decide——"

"I'll go in three, if you don't mind," said Hanson, throwing a brief grin at Hembrook. "She's our latest and I'd like to get a good idea of how she rides. There's one or two minor changes in her."

"All right," I nodded. "The Army men are already assigned. One thing about that to remember: the Army is charged with the responsibility of getting these crates to Houston, and the Greeley responsibility ends the minute we get into the air. Consequently, the Army mechanics are cock of the walk on all mechanical questions. We'll cooperate, of course, but in the last analysis what they say goes.

"Just one thing more. I've decided to go slightly off our route and fly over Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It'll be easier to follow railroads that way, and the capitol will be a good landmark to check up by. All got your maps ready? Just because I'm galloping along in the lead, don't go to sleep at the switch, you other two. One time in Texas I started for El Paso, hit a fog, and ended up in Dallas. Remember that the pusher motor has to be run throttled to twelve or thirteen hundred as soon as you get well in the air, because it heats easily due to its position. Let's go."

Everybody scattered to his plane. Daw got in beside me in the pilots' cockpit, and O'Flynn took his position on a stool in the little passageway behind us, between the two big tanks. He pumped away on the air pressure which fed the gas, and I primed the left-hand Liberty and turned on the gas to it. Then I clicked on the starter switch and pressed the button. She started like a dream and idled along sweetly. Same

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process on the right hand motor, and she started. Then the rear motor, and there were thirty-six mighty cylinders just whispering along. The others were starting, too, and even at idling there was no small noise.

The pilots' seat was the right hand one. Beside the seat on the left were three spark-levers, now at full advance, and on the other side the three throttles. I inched the two outside throttles forward and my eyes watched the instrument board unceasingly. It was sure a maze. Picture this on an instrument board in front of you, with every last needle meaning something vitally important: three tachometers, three Centigrade thermometers, three oil-pressure gages, three air-pressure gages, three voltmeters, three gas controls, three starter buttons, three switches, and miscellaneous banking indicators, a compass, lights, and so forth. But spread on that board was an accurate representation of all that was happening in those motors. Over each motor were additional gages, and O'Flynn back there between the gas tanks with his air-pumps and fire-extinguishers and gages had still more to take care of.

I let the rear motor idle while little by little I let the front ones open up, until finally the thermometer hit seventy Centigrade for them both. I cut the left-hand one back to idling, made sure the factory mechanics were well distributed against the leading edges of the wings, and opened the right-hand motor wide. The right-hand tachometer hit seventeen hundred revolutions a minute, the voltmeter was charging three, as was right and proper, and the oil pressure hopped up to twenty-five pounds.

When the thermometer got to seventy-eight I shut her down, closed the shutters on that radiator to help hold in the heat, and turned my attention to the others. One by one I tried them out, until I had both front motors holding up at well over seventy degrees and the pusher was at sixty. That's plenty hot enough for that baby. Being in the rear its radiation surface is small and it overheats fast. Its propeller revolves between the two fuselages in a Tankwing, which said fuselages even cut off the air current from the sides, making it inefficient in general, but helpful nevertheless.

There was bedlam let loose on the line now as those Libertys roared away on the warm-up. Dust in tremendous clouds shut off the factory entirely. I nodded to the mechanics, and they crawled below and took away the wheelblocks. I decided to get into the air and await my confreres there in case they weren't ready.

O'Flynn took a last peek at his instruments and then strapped himself to his stool with a free-swinging observer's belt that was loose enough to allow him to stand. Daw, sitting awkwardly forward on account of the parachute-hump on his back, was strapped and ready and so was I. I opened the shutters on the two forward motors, and shoved on all three throttles.

I'll say she answered. With over thirteen hundred horsepower in those three motors that four tons of ship started as if shot from a gun. I locked my feet on the rudder-bar and shoved forward on the wheel with all my strength. It was some job, brethren, to get that tail up. The Tankwing jolted and bumped along, racking me badly as the wheel hopped back and forth. Finally the nose came down, and suddenly my work became easy. The air-speed meter was registering close to seventy miles an hour and the edge of the field was looming close when I rocked her off the ground. The second we took the air that great ship handled like a feather. It seemed as responsive as a De Haviland.

When I got a hundred feet, going straight ahead, I throttled the pusher motor to thirteen hundred. The thermometer was already going ——bent for ninety Centigrade, which is boiling. Then I synchronized the two tractors at fifteen hundred, and started a bank. I gave the wheel a bit of a spin to the right, and used pretty liberal right rudder. It took about a mile to make the turn, but I did it without slip or skid, and was booming along back toward the field, three hundred feet high and going higher.

I was anxious to see the other two take off. I wasn't afraid of Goodhue—he's a veteran Border pilot, and that means he could tie a flivver engine to a plank and fly it. But Aloysius was a horse of another color.

I saw Don scuttling across the field, the ship looking as if a house had gone for a stroll. He took the air, and then followed Aloysius.

Well, he made it. By the grace of the flyers' gods, he made it. He was overcontrolling with the rudder, and the ship

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zigzagged. I was starting to sing "Ten thousand dollars going to the folks," which is the cheery song of the Border Patrol, when I saw him get straightened, take the air about fifty feet from the plowed field which bounded the airdrome on that side, then dip as if he'd stalled, and finally make it. I lived six months watching that take-off. But after all, the object of a take-off is to get in the air, and Hembrook had done that. It's like so-called good and bad flyers. If any one starts telling you what a punk flyer somebody is, ask this question:

"Is he with us yet?"

If he's alive, he's good.

The three Tankwings met sociably at two thousand feet, directly over the field. I pointed on our course, and started ahead, my tractor motors throttled to fourteen fifty. Don slid into position fifty feet back of me, fifty feet higher and fifty feet to the right. Aloysius floundered all over the ozone and finally got into position on my left. I gave her the gun—or rather, the guns—and in a three-ship V we lit out for Houston by way of Harrisburg, Boundville, the Ohio River and points south.

It's no cinch to follow a course from the air. Railroads are the best bet, but in a thickly populated country it's like a picture puzzle. There seems to be a regular network of them on the ground, and when you try to start out from some sizable town and follow one of those roads you're pretty well out of luck. And, when you come to to think of it, there's no convenient method of asking your way.

Some day, twenty or thirty years late, there's going to be a law passed to make every town paint its name on some roof. Of course, a few hundred men will have to be killed to call it to the attention of the public at large, and then the lawmakers will come galloping up, covered with sweat, and pass it. If you once become uncertain of where you are in the air—make one mistake—you're gone. There's no way to tell one average place from another, unless there's some out-of-the-ordinary landmark, and they're scarce

Harrisburg was easy to spot through the centering of railroads, and the capitol would give final evidence that we were on the right track. Then I planned to strike the Ohio River well south of Boundville, and fly up the river to it. It would be easy to find because the Government way-station there is right on the banks of the river. The town itself is in that little neck of West Virginia that butts in between Ohio and Pennsylvania.

At five thousand feet, with everything going along nicely and the three Libertys drumming away evenly I had a chance to relax a bit and enjoy myself. There being no propeller ahead to send back an airstream, goggles seemed scarcely necessary and flying was much more pleasant. One could see ahead, too—it seemed as if the whole world was smiling beneath us in the morning sun. Seventy feet of double-wing spreading to right and left, with those trunk-like struts branching upward and seeming as solid as if the whole thing was made of stone.

That ship sure had everything on it—there were bomb-racks and bomb-sights and bomb-releases, parachute flare mechanism, and in one of the fuselage cockpits there was complete radio apparatus, although unconnected now. On one side of our cockpit there was a bunch of electric light buttons, connecting with wing-lights, under landing light, and lights for the instrument board. They were for night-bombing, which I had a taste of when we peppered the *Alabama* at Langham Field and want no more of.

Daw was looking down at the ground, and I nearly had heart failure until I remembered that there was an iron headguard on the side of the cockpit to prevent a man's carelessly sticking his head over too far and running into the propeller. The prop-tips whirled within inches of the cockpit, and of course a prop will go through a man like a buzz-saw through a piece of cheese.

When we hit the mountainous country the thought that I had three motors was very comforting, very. A Tankwing will struggle along with only two of its motors, you know, being overpowered for safety's sake.

We hit Harrisburg right on the nose, and I gave myself a mental slap on the back when I saw the dome of the capitol flashing in the sun. The town itself was pretty well hidden behind a pall of smoke. I could see the Government field at Middletown, with a few D. H.'s on the line. Pretty soon I saw a De Haviland below us, climbing toward us. I throttled a bit, the others following suit to keep in formation, and soon the lighter ship caught us. It slid in within

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a few feet of me, and I could see Jim Kellen waving at me.

He's an old friend of mine, and I was glad to see his homely countenance. I pointed ahead toward Boundville, but he shook his head. With a parting gesture which consisted of placing his thumb to his nose and wiggling derisive fingers he kicked off in a tailspin and went screwing downward like a shot. I saw him straighten and land. He'd come down a mile and landed within a couple of minutes. He always was a loose and careless flyer.

Soon we saw real mountains as we proceeded westward, rolling away in wooded majesty to the skyline. Cañons, cliffs, tiny fields and small streams, with here and there a town tucked surprizingly below some shielding mountain—it was an impressive sight. Reminded me of the mountains around El Paso, although they're wilder than the particular collection of humps we were going over. Later they got still more deserted and barren, and higher, it seemed.

A little less than four hours after our start, at about ten-thirty, the Ohio came into sight, crooking and curling along in tremendous bends. I had set a course well south of Boundville, so I turned north a bit on a diagonal course for the river.

With the end of the first lap in sight, and nothing on my mind for the present, I leaned back restfully and glanced over at Daw. He smiled, his strong white teeth flashing. In close-fitting helmet of shining brown leather, matching his leather coat, and great goggles he looked an airman in keeping with the great ship he was riding.

In many ways, he was the most impressive-looking man I've ever seen. That lineless face, sort of round and smooth and brown, and yet looking as if the flesh was hard and without fat, was a remarkably arresting front-piece for any man to own. Big and seemingly rather fleshy as he was, one got the idea that there was nothing flabby or soft about him. He gave the impression of being iron under velvet, and considerably more iron than velvet. But when he smiled it was good to see, and his eyes smiled too.

By a natural association I thought of Harrik—Daw's friend and my friend. And with the thought there popped into my mind an idea. It was not the result of any conscious process of reasoning—it just appeared, as though intuitively. If there was any connection between Harrik's dead body and that robbery, could it be possible that one of the things the robbers were after was Harrik's gun? Was it not possible that he was in some queer deal which he had entered to assuage his dumbbell wife's craving for luxury? And that possibly his statement that he was going to see Daw was a subterfuge to mask the real purpose of his trip, which was, possibly, to see the very men who had later come to the house?

Suddenly I became pretty nearly convinced that he had been in some frame-up with those men, that he had some papers or money concerning it, that they had quarreled, and he had been shot. Then the men had come to the house to get the papers, and either by accident or design had secured the gun and framed the tableau to look like suicide. The fact that Harrik was on the path seemed to indicate that he had been bound for Daw's house, and yet he might have arranged to meet the men there in the woods.

You notice that I was continually building on the idea, shared by Daw, that Ed had not committed suicide. I felt that he had been drawn into some illegal matter to get money, that he had quarreled with his accomplices, been shot, and left as though he had shot himself. I couldn't figure what sort of deal he'd been drawn in to—he had no Army property to speak of in his charge, or anything of that sort. There must have been some written document in connection with the scheme, judging by the appearance of his den when we had found it. I even thought of bootlegging, that modern profession which has enlisted so much of our best talent.

I was thinking so hard that I nearly committed the most hilarious bone in the flyer's lexicon—flying right over the field I was bound for without seeing it. I'll swear I just happened to look ahead at the wide, tranquil, muddy-looking Ohio and there was the long, narrow field with a landing T in it that we were bound for.

I throttled the pusher to idling speed and the other two to about a thousand revs a minute, and started down. It's no swift job to jockey a Tankwing to the ground. A tight spiral in those babies means covering three-mile circles. I settled down to my knitting, watching to see that the Libertys didn't cool too fast and jazzing the throttles

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occasionally to burn out the oil on the spark-plugs. You never can tell when you'll need your power quick, and a spitting motor close to the ground sings your swansong.

The field lay east and west, on the western bank of the river, and separated from the water by a thin fringe of trees and undergrowth. The tops of the trees were about even with the level of the field, growing on the bank which dropped to the river. I was dropping earthward in big circles, with Don and Hembrook coming down behind me in line. A mile east of the field I was a thousand feet high and headed toward it. The T pointed west, indicating a west wind.

I cut the tractors to six hundred and started down. The ship had a very small gliding angle—about four feet ahead to one down, I should say, and she sort of mushed downward through the air. I saw I was undershooting, and gave her the guns for a minute. We dropped across the river, and as I shut the two tractors and cut the pusher altogether we dropped across the tree-tops ten feet high. By bull luck I pulled back on the wheel and hit the ground on three points. I was waiting for her to hover a bit and warn me, but being so heavy she just dropped and I happened to catch her.

There was a crowd of automobiles on the northern edge of the field—a road ran along there to the two hangars—and I taxied to the line as quickly as possible to give the others a chance. I hadn't used over three-quarters of the field, so I wasn't worrying any about Don nor much about friend Aloysius.

Mechanics helped me taxi in—the Government keeps a half-dozen men there under a sergeant—and I cut off the gas and ran out the motors under the eye of a curious and awestruck crowd. A mere man running one of those L. D. 2s seems like a flea trying to steer an elephant, to the uninitiated—and to some of the initiated.

Don came roaring over the river, about ten feet above it, cut his motors about the middle of the river and made as pretty a landing as you'd want to see, but pretty fast. He nearly overran the field, but saved himself by opening up the left-hand motor, which pulled the ship around to the right in a sweeping circle and saved him from running into the fence.

As Don taxied in Aloysius took his first shot at the field. Half-way across it he was still a couple of hundred feet high, so the Libertys went on in a mighty roar that gave me an idea what all three ships must sound like bellowing together. He circled around and took another shot. This time he hit the ground well back, but didn't get the tail down. He bounced so high the ship looked as small as a scout. On went the motors, down came the nose, and he picked up speed and tried again. And he made it.

I was standing in the cockpit of my ship, running my fingers through my rapidly graying hair. I looked over at Don, in his ship, and that godless youth laughed and turned up his eyes in thanks. Daw had climbed out, and I followed him. Hembrook taxied up, ran out his motors and got out, his square, tanned face wreathed in the first whole-souled grin I ever saw on it.

"Lucky these ships carry plenty of gas, Hembrook," grinned Goodhue.

"Er—yes," grinned Hembrook. "Haw. Haw. Haw."

I told O'Flynn to take charge of the mechanics, and gave him orders about having one of our own men on guard with the field guard at all times, and to see that gas, oil and water were supplied liberally. The sergeant in charge of the field repeated my orders over to make sure he had 'em right, and finally allowed that at six sharp the next morning the ships would be ready to ramble.

By Napoleonic maneuvering we escaped the curious crowd and their questions. Of course Boundville, being on the Dayton-Washington airway, had seen a lot of ships but never any flying tanks such as we had landed in their midst. The Harrik affair did not seem to have penetrated into Boundville, though, which was a blessing. The town didn't get much news from the outside world, I guess. When you come to think of it, though, the outside world didn't get much news from Boundville, either.

I got away after answering only one question. An old boy with chin-whiskers and an old blue, stiff-peaked cap introduced himself as an ex-river captain, pointed to the three rudders of my ship, and wanted to know what them three flippers on the stern wuz. I told him, and then dived for the taxi Daw had already chartered. Hanson went up-town with us,

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and the other Greeley man stayed behind with our mechanics.

Boundville ran along the bank of the river, and consisted of one street. The hotel was a small frame affair with a two-story veranda running its whole length, and was remarkable for the size and weight of the water-pitchers in each room and the waitress in the dining-room. She was unquestionably the homeliest woman I've ever seen, with the exception of a damsel named Minnie Hyson down in Farifus, Texas.

The hotel was run on the American plan, and lunch consisted of about forty-five different varieties of food, a mouthful of each kind. Hembrook was again showing signs of being human. He was so tickled at having safely negotiated his first landing in a Tankwing that even his dignity was not proof against his exultation. I talked mostly to Hanson, whose flying record I respected, and he looked every bit the professional daredevil he was—bold-faced, jeering, with a sort of dark mockery about him and an impatient, semi-contemptuous way of talking about flying.

Modern flying must be child's-play to a man who was navigating the ether when bamboo ships fastened with ordinary wire and unseasoned struts provided transportation. Underneath his flying clothes he was arrayed carelessly in a spotted blue suit, flannel shirt, and striped necktie that screamed to heaven. He didn't look like a fifteen-thousand-dollar-a-year man, which Daw had told me was his salary.

It was toward the end of the meal when I noticed that Aloysius T. had relapsed into his customary frozen-faced reserve. While Don and I were in shirts, breeches and boots he was, as usual, in full uniform, even to a stock. Hembrook was of the type who feel naked without a blouse.

Suddenly he looked up at Daw. I just happened to notice it.

"Mr. Daw, I'd—er—like to see you—er—privately, after lunch," he said.

Daw, as immaculate as he had been when leaving Eelyville that morning, looked up quickly.

"Why certainly, lieutenant," he said urbanely, and yet I could catch his hesitation.

He and Hembrook did rub each other the wrong way; there was no doubt about that.

Hembrook retired into silence again, acting as if momentous affairs were afoot. But then, he always acted that way. Hanson's bold, hard black eyes flashed a look at Daw, and the seams around his mouth deepened in a brief, indescribably sardonic grin. I felt suddenly that there was something going on that I wasn't in on.

After lunch we all smoked a while on the veranda, and listened to Don kid a couple of flip chickabiddies who were stalking traveling salesmen. Finally Daw took his well-shod feet from the railing and threw away his cigar.

"I'm ready if you are, lieutenant," he said to Hembrook.

"Er—yes," said Hembrook, getting up. "Shall we take a walk?"

They started off up the quiet, sunny street, and I could see that Hembrook was doing the talking. Coatless loungers gazed at them curiously, but they seemed to pay no heed. Apparently the conversation was interesting.

"I'm going up to take a nap," I said, uncoiling myself.

"Good idea," nodded Don. "That'll get you in shape for the movies tonight."

I carried out my own suggestion to myself and peeled off the slumber for two hours. When I came down again Goodhue and Daw were on the veranda. I asked no questions about Hembrook's business, but soon Daw brought up the matter.

"Your friend there is rather a queer egg, isn't he?" he remarked as he lighted a new cigar. "Walked me three or four miles for the sole purpose of finding out all possible details about the ships. Now isn't that a funny circumstance for a man who's been around the factory for nearly a week? Wanted to know what the specifications were, where we got the wood and linen and wire and all that stuff, and other details."

"Don't try to figure Aloysius," advised Goodhue. "He's two years older than Plymouth Rock, and twice as dignified, is a lieutenant in the Air Service, and has thwarted ambitions to pepper pythons and prairie dogs in their jungle haunts. Starting from those known facts, you don't get anywhere, so why try?"

"I guess you're right," laughed Daw.

He seemed rather upset, for some reason. He puffed on his cigar rapidly, and seemed unable to keep still. He always gave the impression of forceful energy under control, but now he was tapping his fingers,

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smoking fast, and talking faster and with less easy geniality than was his custom. In response to my casual inquiry about Hanson he told me that he had gone out to the field to see that everything was going all right and to inspect the ships and see how they'd stood their first extended cruise.

We talked quite a bit about Hanson and his record—he'd flown across the country several times in all kinds of ships, had been a country-fair dare-devil for a couple of years, and had been a friend of Daw's for considerable time.

"In fact, it was him that got me in this air game up to my neck," the manufacturer stated. "He was test pilot at the plant, and had around twenty thousand of his own he wanted to invest. He knew my previous interest in the game and my penchant for throwing a shoe string around a business and trying to lasso a lot of money out of it. He's a share-holder in the corporation, which is a good arrangement all around."

"How did he and Harrik get along—all right?" I asked.

"Well enough, although they didn't see much of each other. Ralph took a vacation while we were getting the ships out. Our contract specified delivering three ships a month starting with June. We're a little ahead of schedule with these, you see."

I took the opportunity to state my recently formulated scenario of what happened to Harrik: extravagant wife, driven into getting money illegally, a quarrel with his accomplices, a murder which was probably unplanned, and then the desperate effort to steal incriminating documents and, either by accident or design, the gun to make the thing look like suicide.

"Don and I and Hembrook all agree that he did not have a gun when he left the house," I concluded. "He just had on a dinner coat, you know, and he couldn't have hid a big Colt, I don't believe."

Daw threw up his hands.

"It's got me wondering," he admitted. "I can't believe your hypothesis about being in any illegal machinations, though. He mentioned repeatedly that he was playing the market a bit. I burnt my fingers there twice before, and wasn't interested. Any market plunging I do will be in stocks that I'm interested in. I gave him a little advice, but he laughed and said he was just piking on margin. I believe Mrs. Harrik did have rather—extravagant tastes for his income, and was responsible for his speculating. I instinctively recoil from believing that he committed suicide, but I'm bound to say that it begins to look like it. With the Army, civilian authorities, and Frawley, the private detective, who has worked for me before and is a wonder, all on the case it seems as if anything weird ought to be uncovered."

"It does, at that," acknowledged Goodhue, who was using his world's champion cigaret-holder for a drum stick at the moment. "And yet they can't find a broker in New York——"

"May have been in a crooked bucket-shop, although I remember warning him," said Daw. "They may have shut up shop on him, you know."

We talked on, going over and over the thing, and getting nowhere. It was nearly six o'clock when I announced my intention of going out to the field and seeing how things were getting along. Daw declined the journey with thanks, but Don came along. We walked—it was a little over a mile, and the heat had let up enough to make it comfortable walking.

There were a number of people about, and O'Flynn was answering their questions as best he might. The ships were staked down, and motors and cockpits were covered with their canvas protectors. I borrowed my stocky Irish mechanic for a while and made inquiry touching upon the health of the ships.

"All ready t' go, sor," said the sergeant with the slightest of brogues.

"Where's Gaston?" I asked, Gaston being the husky sergeant who was mechanic on Hembrook's ship.

"He and this here Hanson went off t'gether," stated O'Flynn. "I thought it was all right, the worruk bein' done. They got real friendly-like, all of a sudden."

Tall, weather-beaten, lantern-jawed Hewitt, the other Army mechanic, came up to where we were talking.

"That there wop from the Greeley factory don't know nothin'," he told Goodhue disgustedly. "Mr. Hanson does, but this here wop— Gosh! If he's a sample o' their experts——"

He said the rest of it with tobacco juice, expectorating accurately at a stone.

O'Flynn's freckled face got still rounder as he grinned.

"He'd better go back to prize-fightin',"

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he remarked. "Says that's what he used to do. If he wasn't no better fighter'n he is a mechanic, it's a wonder his neck wasn't broken as well as his nose."

"He don't know nothin'," reiterated Hewitt.

That gave Don and me something to chew about going home. It did seem queer that a mechanical dud should be selected for the trip.

"It may just be jealousy or dislike, though," Goodhue pointed out. "Army *vs.* the civies, you know—they never do get along. I noticed that he seemed awkward around the pumps when I was starting the warm-up back in Eelyville. Hewitt was back there on the trip and Bayzi—that's his name—rode beside me. Let's forget it and absorb a few dozen more kinds of food to fortify us for the movies. 'Crimson Love' is the picture we shall see. What color do you like your love, Slim?"

"No preference. The love I have observed of recent years has had a lot of long green in it," I told him.

Dinner was a rather silent meal, Hembrook being a wet-blanket by nature, and Daw himself far from his usual easy, ingratiating self. The irrepressible Goodhue and I did most of the reparteeing, so to speak. Hanson had not shown up, and I explained his absence.

"No telling what he's up to," said Daw.

The movie we saw was wild and woolly, teeming with battle, murder and artistically sudden death. But it was no wilder than the ideas which were beginning to swarm in my mind. I couldn't formulate them into a connected theory—but I wish I was able to shake off the persistent thought that perhaps I was partly responsible for what happened next day. As I look back on it, it seems to me that I ought to have figured things out more definitely. I don't see how I missed the conclusion which now seems so inevitable.

VII

IT WAS Hanson who gave me the news next morning while we were all engaged in inhaling a five-thirty breakfast.

"Gaston wants to see you," he said, that jeering smile more apparent than ever on his bold, dark face. "He's pretty sick."

I left the oncoming fried eggs flat and went up-stairs, followed by Goodhue. The husky mechanic was in bed, and he looked like the tag end of a misspent life. He was pale and wan, his eyes glittering feverishly below heavy brows.

"I'm sorry, lieutenant, but I'm sick as a dog," he told me huskily. "Hanson an' I drunk some likker last night and it knocked me loose. Hanson is all right, seems like, but I—I'm feelin' bad, sir."

"You're one sick soldier that isn't bluffing," I told him. "You look —— near dead. Did Hanson drink with you?"

"Yes, sir. But seems like he stood it all right."

"Can't travel today, that's plain. We'll leave you here, and you can catch us by rail. This hangover'll probably leave you in a few hours. Catch us either at Louisville or Memphis. Need a doctor?"

"I don't think so, sir."

I found out that he had enough money, so we went down-stairs. I figured that as soon as the nausea wore off he'd be all right.

"You're shy one mechanic," I told Hembrook, who was more sour-looking than ever. "Hanson here and Sergeant Gaston had a little party, and it put Gaston out for the count. How do you feel, Hanson?"

The test-pilot grinned.

"All right. I'm sorry, Evans. We just ran into some mountain dew and had a few drinks. I never dreamed it would affect that big bozo. Must have been something wrong with his stomach before, I guess."

Hembrook was boring into the civilian pilot with his eyes. Hanson met his gaze, his lips curling momentarily in a sardonic grin. Aloysius never said a word, but his eyes shifted to Daw, who was devoting himself to breakfast. There was a brief interval of tense silence, which I broke by saying:

"Well, let's chow, Don. We're way behind the others."

The mechanics were already on their way out to the field, so we finished hastily and made a start.

"I'm sorry about Gaston, Evans," Daw said on the way out. "But as Hanson said, he couldn't possibly have figured that a few drinks would lose you a man temporarily."

"We'll navigate all right—it won't hold us up," I told him.

Hembrook sat back, silent and cold. I'll swear I could feel his resentment as plainly as if he had voiced it. Again I wondered

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what it was he had in the back of his mind. There was something, and it was affecting all of us. Seemed to inject a sort of subterranean suspicion in the party. It was as if everybody was uncomfortable, and did not know quite why.

The ships were warming up when we arrived, and within a few minutes we were in the air. Hembrook made the takeoff better this time, and within fifteen minutes after our arrival at the field we had rendezvoused at a thousand feet and were straightened out for Louisville, flying in the same positions as the day before.

There really was no course to follow. All we had to do was follow the Ohio right on down. Cincinnati on the right bank and then, a hundred miles on, Louisville. That's some trip to take—the Ohio seemed like a Gargantuan serpent writhing its way along between wooded banks which were speckled with small towns. To the south stretched the far-famed Kentucky Mountains, seemingly as lifeless as they looked mysterious and limitless. Everybody, I guess, is familiar with the legends of bloodshed and deadly feud-struggles which have gone on for a hundred years within those rugged fastnesses, and as I took in the quiet green panorama my imagination soared to the associations it invoked.

We were past Cincinnati and the Big Miami, and the day's trip was more than half-completed before I got my mind off the landscape and I commenced to turn over again in my mind the vague surmises which it seemed I could never forget completely. The mystery of Harrik's death, what was going on in the back of Hembrook's mind, what my own sergeants had said of the Daw mechanic—it seemed as if everything combined to color the whole expedition with a certain grimness and discomfort.

Suddenly I felt an iron grip on my shoulder. I turned to meet Daw's eyes, and they were flaming behind his goggles with a light that was almost that of madness. He pointed behind us, and I turned to look. I saw Goodhue's ship, but no sign of Hembrook.

Daw's finger was pointing downward. For a moment I couldn't see anything against the flat green earth, and then the great olive-drab Tankwing stood out suddenly against the ground. It was sweeping downward in a whirling tailspin, and instinctively I knew that four tons of ship, spinning and falling as it was, could never be brought under control.

For what seemed like an eternity we sat and watched. It grew smaller, smaller and smaller, and as it came closer to the ground seemed to be spinning with greater rapidity. As if in a trance I saw a splotch of white off to one side, with what seemed like a dummy swinging beneath it.

"Hanson got out, and Gaston was sick, thank God!" I remember thinking, and then my thoughts veered to the time when Aloysius was inspecting those lions in front of the library in New York. Possibly because that was the most human thing I ever saw him do.

I had automatically thrown my ship into a bank, and was circling. I forgot Daw, Goodhue, everything. Just waiting. I was like a cake of ice—a flying emergency always affects me like that. I don't think a muscle moved as the ship hit the ground.

A solid mass of flame glowed like a glimpse of hell, and then a huge mass of red-shot smoke mercifully hid the scene. The ship had hit the ground within fifty yards of the river-bank. I could see a few people, like ants, covering the ground with maddening lack of speed, and others were emerging from the scattered houses. There was a thin line of flat fields lining the river between the mountains and the water, and it was in one of the fields that Hembrook had crashed, and was now being cremated in that grim funeral pyre below.

The very next field was long and narrow and seemed to be closely mowed. I brought my Tankwing down so fast that every strut was quivering and the whining, screaming wires almost drowned the roar of the three throttled Libertys.

A brief glance over at Daw showed him with his face buried in his hands. His shoulders were shaking, as if his body was racked with sobs. It seemed the climax of that ill-fated, shadowed trip. Suddenly it seemed to me that from the moment I had stepped off the train and shaken the limp hand of Ed Harrik there had never been a moment when I had not been conscious of a foreboding of disaster.

I had forgotten Hanson completely, for the moment, but as I straightened out, a few hundred yards west of the field and pointed for it, I saw him directly ahead. He was a hundred feet from the ground,

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slipping his 'chute desperately in an effort to keep himself from dropping into the river. It would have been in keeping with the luck of the trip if he had hit the water and been drowned, but he made it. I saw him hit the ground, less than ten feet from the undergrowth at the edge of the river. He was dragged a short distance, and then his parachute crumpled against the bushes on the bank.

I shot for the field, and dropped over the boundary fence with a few feet to spare. I half-expected to wreck, but when the wheels trundled along the ground without sinking in I knew I was all right. Don was coming down a half-mile behind me, so I taxied over to the fence, to get out of his way, and cut the switches.

O'Flynn, his round face unperturbed, was at my shoulder as I unsnapped the belt.

"Tough luck, sor," he said. "I wonder what happened?"

"Search me—maybe he just couldn't handle her," I said, and Daw raised his head.

As his eyes caught the flaming mass directly ahead of us in the next field he shrank back.

"He was dead the minute he hit, of course, so don't let those flames get your goat," I told him.

It was the first—and last—time I ever saw the big fellow lose his poise.

"It's—frightful," he whispered huskily.

"There's nothing pretty about any airplane wreck," I told him. "Let's go. There's nothing we can do except keep the crowd off, I guess."

Some well-intentioned dumb-bells were making wild dashes toward the flames, as though getting Hembrook's body now would do any good. We ran over as Goodhue came in and landed safely.

There was nothing left. A melted motor, half-buried in the ground, and a tangled mass of blackened metal. Every inch of wood and linen gone, of course. We couldn't get within fifty feet of it, the heat was so great. Hembrook's body—what was left of it—was plainly discernible. Women were crying wildly, and a lot of men were wiping their eyes. There were perhaps fifty people there, and a few more were on the way.

Some of them tried to ask questions, but I told them they knew as much as we did about it all, and went to meet Hanson.

He was as cool as May morning. As his black eyes, a curious glinting light in them, met mine he shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"What happened?" I demanded.

Daw came up, and Goodhue, and in a second the whole mob was surrounding Hanson and me. There was silence so sudden and so complete that it was like a physical shock. Only the crackling of the flames competed with Hanson's rough bass as he said:

"I don't know, lieutenant, exactly. It may have been something wrong with the ship, but if you'll excuse me for saying it about poor Hembrook, I believe it was because he's not very good at flying big ships. I was riding back between the gas tanks, of course, Gaston having saved his life by taking a few drinks last night. I was looking over the gages and pumped up the air-pressure on the right tank when I felt the ship stall suddenly. As I looked up it seemed as if the plane was standing right on its tail. Hembrook was working the wheel like a madman—forward and back. The ship didn't answer. Now, as I say, that might have been because the stall was so complete that we had no speed and the controls wouldn't work, or it might have been that the controls went bad all of a sudden. Frankly, I can't conceive of that, for I myself as well as your own mechanics and Lieutenant Hembrook inspected everything carefully, and there had been no strain on them.

"However, that's as may be. I believe he stalled the ship and went into a panic. I tore off my belt and jumped forward. The ship was still hovering. As I got to the front seats she snapped down. For a second or two I don't know just what happened. Having no belt on, I was thrown against the top wing, and the next second found myself falling. How I escaped that back prop I don't know. I pulled the ripcord of the 'chute, and she opened all right. The next thing I knew the Tankwing was spinning down, and within a few seconds was screwing down so fast that I knew Hembrook could never pull it out."

Don was not looking at Hanson at all. His eyes were on the wreck, fifty feet or so away. His eyebrows were arched upward, and he had a burning cigaret in his hand. In the momentary silence he turned and looked at me, an unreadable expression in his eyes. Like a flash, for no good reason, blurred, widely separated happenings seemed

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to fall into place in my mind. I didn't know what the completed mosaic would be, exactly, and yet for the first time it seemed to me that I was groping toward a definite conclusion.

I'll never forget that moment—quiet, sobbing crowd, crackling flames, hot sunlight, Hanson standing there quietly, with Daw and the mechanics at his back and the ring of curious onlookers making a circle about us. In that second I felt as if fifteen minutes quiet thought would bring me out of the dizzy mental labyrinth into which recent events had led me, and that I was on the verge of an explanation for everything. It was maddening to have to wait to think the thing through and get mentally organized, but there was much to do.

Hanson's hypothesis—about Hembrook's sudden panic—was a reasonable one, and his whole story rang true as gospel. I knew that. And yet I felt that I was about ready to break through the blank wall which hid a lot of things I wanted to know—and was bound to know.

I wrenched my mind away from that, however. In a few seconds I had made up my mind. I picked a tall, intelligent-looking man who was standing quietly in the rear of the crowd. He had driven up in a good-looking car.

"Will you send some telegrams from the nearest office for me?" I asked directly.

"Anything in the world I can do I will," he returned, his full face pale and his eyes showing the strain under which he was laboring.

It seemed as if Hembrook had been forgotten by the crowd in the consuming interest with which they hung on every word.

"Who has a pencil and paper?"

Both were thrust into my hand.

I wrote out this telegram to the chief:

L. D. 2 No. 3 crashed at 8:30 A.M. this morning. Lieutenant Hembrook, pilot, killed. Hanson, civilian mechanic, unhurt. Army mechanic not in ship through illness. Have held inquiry on spot. Cause of plane's going completely out of control at five thousand feet unknown but testimony of Hanson is that controls were useless. Ship total wreck, burned. Nothing can be salvaged. Am carrying body to Louisville and unless otherwise instructed will place it in charge of commanding officer, Goddard Field. Unless otherwise instructed will continue trip as scheduled—EVANS.

I wrote another message to be telephoned to Major Williamson, who had just been ordered to Goddard Field as commanding officer, and placed both in charge of this Kentuckian I had picked out. He started out for town right away to get them off.

There was deathly silence while I was writing. When I finished the flames had burned themselves out, and I dispatched another messenger for town to get some canvas to wrap around what little remained of Hembrook. O'Flynn went along to make sure we got what we wanted.

The mechanics, Daw, Goodhue and I withdrew a bit and sat down on the ground to wait. The growing crowd kept by themselves, talking in low tones as they looked at the smoking heap. I saw no reason to try to dash water on the pile yet—better to let it go. I know it sounds callous, and yet it was better so.

Daw seemed to have regained his poise, although his eyes held a deep shadow and at intervals his face worked spasmodically. He was deeply affected, there was no doubt about that. And he was unaccustomed to the ups and downs—of which the worst are the downs—of flying. On the other hand Hanson was cool and unexcited, seemingly entirely unaffected by his recent experience. The rest of the crew showed no signs of particular shakiness. One has to take accidents with comparative lightness—or quit flying.

Both Don and Hewitt, his mechanic, seemed to be mulling things over in their mind. I noticed Hewitt's deep-set, sun-crinkled eyes roving to Hanson frequently, and Don smoked silently, as if immersed in thought. Bayzli, the hairy gorilla from the Greeley factory, seemed to enjoy the sudden prominence of the outfit, and finally walked over toward the wreck and began to talk to the crowd. Daw made Hanson tell the story of what happened over and over, as if trying to convince himself and everybody else that one of his beloved Tankwings had not gone wrong.

I didn't say much—I was wondering whether there was anything I had forgotten to do and whether my scheme of handling the body was the best one. Always in the back of my mind was the feeling that very soon I would grope my way out of the mental fog in which I found myself—that I was within a few steps of something big and unbelievably sinister. Yet, for the life of me, I couldn't place my finger on it right then. I wondered whether Don and Hewitt

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were thinking along the same line. Don had something on his mind besides the wreck, and the lathe-like, leathery-faced Hewitt looked as if he was inroaded by speculation.

When O'Flynn got back we got some pails, doused the wreck and sewed the little heap of bones that was Hembrook into a sack. He was carried in the cockpit of my ship. We took off without accident, and in an hour and a half were spiraling down over Bowman Field, the civilian landing-field in Louisville. Drawn up alongside the field were at least fifty cars, and among them was a hearse, several Army cars, and some trucks. A company of soldiers was drawn up in front of the crowd. Major Williamson had evidently been on the job.

As we were coming down I glanced over at Daw. During the flight he had apparently been unaffected by the gruesome burden we carried, and had seemed to be himself again. I had seen him smile as he looked back and beheld O'Flynn hunched down on his stool, reading a magazine. Now, however, he was looking down at the crowd, and that smooth, tanned face of his was suddenly etched with bitter lines. He and Hembrook had not got along well together, but apparently the man most affected by the crash was the one beside me.

In a moment we were scraping over the ground, having reached the town where much was to be made clear to me.

VIII

AT FIVE o'clock that afternoon Don and I were reclining in my room at the hotel in a state of comfortable deshabille, so to speak. All afternoon we had been busy, and I'll say we were weary. Now, however, it appeared that we had a few minutes to ourselves. Hembrook's body was out at Goddard Field; we had told the newspaper boys all we could, had dodged a thousand or so curious Kentuckians, had given statements about the wreck to Major Williamson, and performed divers other duties.

Daw had got us rooms—which is some job the day before the Derby in Louisville—and had done everything in his power for us. He seemed to know a bunch of people—when we walked in the lobby of the principal hostelry, where we were at present ensconced, he had spoken to a dozen men. He had a cosmopolitan acquaintance, all right. There were race-track men, native Louisvillians, and one or two unprepossessing specimens who might have been anything from touts to bootleggers. It was easy to see that the good-looking and prosperous Mr. Daw moved in the younger sporting set.

He had outlined a fine program for the evening, which was to embrace a tour of the better-known road-houses as well as visits to some more exclusive rendezvous. The town was jammed like a big sardine box, and the only conversational subject which had any chance against the morrow's race was the trip of the Tankwings from New York to Texas, and the events connected therewith. We split the headlines with the race-horses, and were nearly as prominent as the jockeys.

Don and I, for some reason, rather avoided the subject of Hembrook, Harrik and allied matters. I had figured out a crazy, far-fetched theory to account for all that had happened, and yet I felt diffident about enunciating it, even to Don. Perhaps that was the feeling that Hembrook had had—I don't know. I wanted a little more time to get it in shape, as well as to convince myself that I wasn't an unmitigated ass before I sprung it. It seemed as if Don was in the same position. We'd sheer off the subject whenever we got to talking about it.

"I hate to think of it, but I guess I'd better make a trip out to the field and see that everything is all right," I said finally. "I've decided that in place of one man to guard the ships tonight I'll keep both Hewitt and O'Flynn out there."

"Why both of them, and if so why not use Bayzli and let one of the noble sergeants loose in the city? It sure is a town, today."

"Bayzli's duty ended here in Louisville," I reminded him. "We proceed without the aid of the factory from now on. As for the reason for keeping both the boys out there——"

I hesitated, because I didn't quite know myself. Just the dim thought that my devious suspicions might have some foundation.

"Recent events have got on your nerves," Don finished for me.

He shot me a sharp glance from those brilliant dark eyes of his, blew out that lanky cigaret-holder, and proceeded to the

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bureau to make sure that his hair was parted in the exact center.

"Wrap some haberdashery around you, and let's go," he said.

Which we did. We found about ten cars out there, and O'Flynn told us that there had been as high as two hundred people at one time to look over the ships. A few more drove up, but as dusk started to fall the crowd thinned. In a few minutes we were without spectators. Hewitt was hard at work inspecting Don's ship, and O'Flynn reported that he had finished work on mine and that it was O.K. from cockpit to rúdders. Bayzli and Hanson had departed for good, apparently.

"A —— of a lot of good this wop was, anyway," snorted Hewitt as he came over to us. "He couldn't drive a nail in a snowbank."

"Here come some more curious onlookers. Wonder if they brought their lanterns?" remarked Don as a big car drove into the field.

The others had parked on the road, but this one came right on the field and drove up to the ships. We were standing a few yards away from them.

They were a noisy bunch, and as they drew up within a few feet of Don's ship I thought I saw a bottle being cached on the floor of the car after having served its mission. They piled out and started walking around the ship.

"Maybe we'd better drift over there—they may be a wee bit too curious," I remarked, and we started over toward them.

I was right. As we got within a few yards of them I saw two of them climbing up to the cockpits. That sort of business isn't allowed around a plane—laymen are more liable than not to stick a foot through the linen of a wing or do other damage.

"Don't climb around the ship, or touch it!" I yelled. "Sorry, but those are the orders!"

"Huh?"

The fellow on the nearest wing turned as he grunted that question and looked down at us.

"These flyers is —— particular, ain't they?" inquired the fellow on the other wing, and there was a burst of laughter from the other three, who walked over toward us.

Neither of the climbers made a move to get down.

"Yes, we're particular!" Don announced, walking closer with me. "Get down *pronto!*"

"Well, well!"

This bird, who was short and stocky, wearing a blue serge suit and a derby hat, looked down and half-laughed as he said that. The other three were crowding closely around us.

My temper slipped right then. I made a jump, and got this fellow around the neck. He had been standing with his feet on the steps by which one climbs into the cockpits. I hauled him down and sent him spinning into his friends' arms.

The fellow on the other side hit the ground without assistance. My man got to his feet, snarling oaths in a steady stream. He leaped in, but I had too long a reach. I floored him with a right to the button that did the dirty deed with neatness and dispatch.

"Let's get 'em, the ——!" somebody yelled, and the other four closed in.

Hewitt, O'Flynn, Don and I were believers in getting the jump. In a split second we were on our way forward, and met them half-way. It was so dark by now that faces were indistinguishable, but we went to it with a will.

I had the biggest man—a huge fellow in a cap. I got in a beauty to the midriff which he paid me for with a swing to the side of the head that might have made me count the daisies if I hadn't had a chance partly to dodge it. In an instant I was in the midst of as pretty a thirty-second scrap as I have ever had the honor to mingle in.

He was a slugger, pure and simple. He made me give ground—not rushing, just boring in. I danced away, using my long arms to good advantage until I brought up alongside the ship. Then I had to go in there and fight. One-two to jaw and belly, and I took a hefty smack in the neck in return. For a few seconds all I could see was flying fists as we stood up and swapped punches. I got slightly stunned by a left to the jaw, and the next second he had me in his arms in a grip that would have done credit to a grizzly bear. My nose was bleeding, and I was seeing red.

We hit the ground like a ton of brick, with him on top. I just had sense enough to pull an old rough-and-tumble trick that I learned in brawls out in Utah. As I hit I twisted mightily. The shock of the fall

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plus my twist threw him partly off of me, and his terrible grip relaxed a trifle. I clawed and kicked like a wildcat, and it worked. The next second I was on top.

I was mad. So mad that I jumped to my feet.

"Get up, my boy, and meet your hay-maker!" I yelled at him.

As he started to his feet I let him have it as soon as he was on one knee. It carried everything I had in stock at the moment, which is fair-to-middling as amateurs go, and he went down like an ox under the sledge-hammer. I could hear Don Goodhue's laugh ring out—that bird would grin in the devil's face—and then O'Flynn—

"Noice wan, sor!"

My man lay quietly, so I had a chance to turn and look. Don and his opponent—a little fellow—were still hard at it. Hewitt was sitting on his man's chest, and O'Flynn was methodically polishing off his antagonist.

Suddenly I heard the rasping voice of my late opponent. I was trying to dam up my streaming proboscis at the time.

"C'mon, boys!" he yelled, and the next second shot past me and tipped Hewitt off the other thug's chest. As though that was the signal, the two men still fighting broke for the automobile, followed by my adversary and Hewitt's conquered gladiator.

We didn't follow them. Just as quick as the Lord would let them they started the car and swept around. They drove close to us as they went out.

"We'll get you for this!" one of them yelped, and there followed a stream of filthy insults.

"Nice, genteel boys," remarked Goodhue, feeling one eye with tender solicitude.

I heard O'Flynn chuckle, and Hewitt grunt contemptuously. As for me, I was inundated with speculations and conclusions. By no conscious process of reasoning, but rather, I suppose, as a natural result of the last few days of almost continuous mental groping after the explanation that had persistently eluded me, I became suddenly certain of my ground. That is, for the moment. I wasted no time in sharing my surmises. With my handkerchief to my nose, I said:

"Sit down, caballeros, and listen. Don, what do you think of Daw?"

"Nice fellow," said that youth surprizedly. "Why?"

"Ed Harrik, Government inspector, with an extravagant wife, is mysteriously murdered, although it looked like suicide, and is known to have got ten thousand berries somewhere in a mysterious manner. His papers are gone through by three strangers the same night. Hembrook, after having poked around the factory for a few days, indicated that he had some vague suspicions about something, and he and Daw do not get along well together. Later, his ship goes wrong and he is killed and the ship destroyed. The Army mechanic is sick at the time, and Hanson has a parachute and escapes."

I could fairly feel those three men thinking, trying to follow me and get what I was driving at.

"Well, what about it?" asked Don slowly, his eyes resting on me steadily.

Hewitt and O'Flynn seemed to be digesting my words, and waiting tensely.

I switched my line.

"Did you stop to think that what just happened here was very peculiar?" I went on. "Five men, seeming to be slightly illuminated, drive in here at dusk, start climbing over the ships, act as though seeking a fight, and when they get that same fight show no further symptoms of drunkenness. At least mine didn't."

Three nods proved that the others' opponents had been fairly spry.

"They picked a time when nobody else was here, had a little scrap which they apparently were deliberately seeking, and then beat it away, blaring threats."

"Well, sor?"

It was O'Flynn, and I caught the ghost of a smile and the slightest of nods from him, as if he, too, was seeing a light.

"This is Daw's home town, isn't it?" I inquired oratorically. "And he has proved already that he knows the ins and outs of the place a little, hasn't he, Don?"

"I'll say so. But just what are you driving at, Slim?"

"With those hints, do you piece together some explanation for all that has happened on this trip, as well as something that may happen in the future? I ask you because I want some corroboration. If anybody else in the world came to the conclusion I have, I'd feel more sure of myself, and not as if I was defaming a good fellow."

Suddenly Hewitt slapped his thigh.

"By ——! I get you, sir!"

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O'Flynn chuckled, and Don took out his cigaret-holder.

"I can give an explanation—which Daw is at the bottom of—for one or two things, even including Hembrook's demise, possibly. But I can't even come close to accounting for everything. Wait a minute. I can't even account for anything. As I think of Daw being concerned in Hembrook's death, it doesn't hold water. A little personal dislike doesn't sound reasonable as a basis for murder—and Hanson was in the plane with Hembrook. Shoot your stuff, Slim. What have you got running around in your mind?"

It was dark by now, and the figures of my three tripsters were shadowy bulks in the dusk, their faces lit intermittently by glowing cigaret butts. As Don was talking my feet commenced to chill, and when I started to tell them what I had in mind I'll be hanged if I didn't think I was making an utter ass of my self.

"I'm no Sherlock Holmes, and this theory of mine I'll admit is —— improbable, but such as it is it popped into my mind ready-made this very evening, and dove-tailed with a lot of vague ideas that have been knocking at my mental doors heretofore. Listen:

"I want to account for the murder of Ed Harrik, how he got ten thousand dollars, and the reason for the robbery of his house, first. Daw is a speculative business man, who has knocked around oil-fields, Mexico, and all that stuff. He takes over a new airplane company, and lands a tremendous contract for Tankwings by underbidding everybody else. The nearest bid to him was five thousand a ship, and most of the bids ten to fifteen thousand higher. He admitted to us that he simply wanted to keep his factory open and the men busy, and didn't figure on making any money on the contract.

"Now suppose the company was in a bad way financially, as I presume it was. And suppose Daw wanted to clean up a few thousand dollars velvet right away to keep the business and himself above water. You know how it is; you can build an automobile for six hundred berries and yet a lot of cars cost and seem to be worth from four to ten thousand. I suppose if the makers of one of those babies wanted to cheat he could put out a car that would look natural, but really cost him less than fifty per cent. of his usual outlay.

"Suppose Daw figured something like this: The Tankwings were to be built of the best all the way through. Daw built one—the one I'm flying—and it was O.K. Then he was O.K.ed for the rest of the bunch, and Ed Harrik sent in as Government inspector. Suppose Daw, in financial straits, decided to cheat on the next two ships—Hembrook's ex-plane and yours, Don? My surmises do not include cheating all through the rest of the contract, although that might be true. I do think there is a fine chance that Daw cheated on these two ships, shaving the production cost maybe twenty thousand a ship by using poorly-dried, inferior wood, hasty workmanship, and all that sort of thing. Probably figured, if I am not just an ordinary —— fool about it all, that, instead of working along even, the company would make forty thousand on these two ships."

"Well I'll be ——!" I heard Don saying to himself, and Hewitt indulged again in his favorite gesture—slapping himself resoundingly on the thigh.

"Now enter Harrik!" I went on, having set fire to a fresh cheroot. "He had this extravagant wife on his hands. Daw, according to my theory, got around Harrik and for ten thousand bucks got Ed to pass these two planes. That would account for his nervousness, the money, and what finally happened.

"If that's right, of course it doesn't sound so unreasonable to believe that Ed, having a fit of conscience after seeing us, just went out and shot himself. But I don't think so. I knew him well, and while because of his wife he may have fallen for bribery, I do not think there is any amount of money that would have tempted him into any scheme whereby I—or any other flyer—might be in unusual physical danger. To get around that, Daw might have convinced Ed, or Ed known, for that matter, being inspector, that the ships were safe enough for a while, but not built of really high-class stuff. That would mean that while we, on this trip, were in no particular danger, nevertheless some poor bozo would be after the ships had had a few hours' service.

"My idea is that when we finally got on the ground Ed got suffering with conscience, and that when we came in the night of his murder he had decided to go see Daw, tell him that matters were all off and that he,

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Ed, was going to spill the works. That would account for what he said when we came in, Don. Then he probably got to see Daw all right, at Daw's house. There is no reason why, purely by accident, Ed could not have got into the house, at such a late hour, without being seen. Not that he particularly tried to avoid detection, but through taking that path and the location of Daw's bungalow it just happened that way.

"Daw probably owns that old servant of his body and soul. Harrik springs the deal, and Daw kills him—either there or later. Use a gun with a silencer, maybe. Then he succeeds in getting three of his employees, trusted men who have probably been with him in former deviltry, to break in Harrik's house, get any giveaway papers. Ed might have had about the deal, and likewise his gun. Remember that four hours elapsed between Harrik's leaving the house and the finding of his body.

"Well, they go through the papers, get the gun and frame the suicide thing. As for the Colt .45 bullet—Daw probably had a Colt, or he may even have murdered Harrik with Harrik's own gun. There are a dozen possible explanations for that, and remember the loneliness of the path, the hour of the night, and those things. My point is that my theory in its general details is *possible*. And remember, for heaven's sake, that I'm talking now in a purely speculative way, on the theoretical assumption that Daw is a blackguard and a crook. Leave the personal prejudice which we all have in favor of Daw to one side for a while, and assume that he is capable of what I'm saying.

"That fixes Harrik. Now for Hembrook. The idea I have worked out is that Daw never intended to have the two ships which were not up to specifications reach Houston. It would only be a matter of time when his cheating would be discovered, so he may have figured to arrange matters so that they would never reach their destination. If that is true, it would point to the idea that Daw simply wanted to make twenty thousand cash for himself or the factory on the first two, and really planned to live up to the contract in the future Tankwings he turned out. I believe he roped in Harrik by explaining that the ships would be destroyed before they had a chance to harm anybody, and that in the last analysis they were just robbing the Government of one hundred and forty thousand dollars, getting a small slice of it themselves with the rest of the amount represented by busted ships.

"To my mind, that explains the rather unusual request to have factory mechanics go along on the trip as far as Louisville here, and likewise the fact that Daw himself, Hanson, an old friend and an interested party, and this wop who don't know a cotter-pin from dihedral were along. The wop was picked as a reliable crook and not a mechanic!"

I stopped talking for a moment, but no one said anything. All three of them were motionless, waiting. Out on the pike an occasional automobile sped along, headlights flaring momentarilly as they shot past. An interurban car whirred by, and then dead silence settled down again. I had made an impression on my confrères, at any rate. As I talked, reducing my deductions to their simplest terms, I gradually regained the certainty which I had felt at the time that automobile load of trouble-seekers first stimulated my mental convolutions.

"You know what kind of a fellow Hembrook was, Don—always serious-minded, studying, and possessing a single-track mind. Is it not possible that in his systematic poking around the factory he got a clue to the cheating that was going on?" I went on after waiting a while for somebody else to say something. "It would be just like old Aloysius to know the specifications of a Tankwing by heart, and he was a persistent question-asker. He had a huge capacity for facts. Wouldn't that account for his mysterious hints? And would it not be natural that he should hesitate to say anything so serious until he really knew? I can realize his position, because I'm in it now myself. It's not an easy thing to start talking like this about any man, least of all a near-friend like Daw. I still feel a little foolish as I unfold my bloodthirsty yarn.

"Anyway, supposing what I said to be the approximate facts, do a little more low-and-lofty supposing, and figure that in some way, by tactless questions or something of the sort, Hembrook started getting under Daw's skin, making him suspicious. It's my idea that Daw and Hanson and perhaps a few trusted employees would know about the crooked work, and nobody else. A few

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forged blueprints would fix it so that the great mass of workmen wouldn't know anything. Each man has his little job, and if cheaper wood and sloppier connections and quick and careless fitting were called for, it would be none of their business. On a lot of things, such as propellers, linen, quality of wire, etc., no one but the man who did the buying of them would know just what quality was used. Anyway, all that could be arranged by smart crooks.

"My supposition is that Hembrook kept chewing away on his clues, and asked questions of a kind to make Daw uneasy. Then, at Boundville, on that walk, I figure Hembrook may have gone further into the open. It's my idea that there was never any plot to kill anybody until that time. It would be rather a matter of destroying the ships while they were on the ground. But in Boundville something may have occurred to make it necessary to get rid of Hembrook—and what he knew, or thought he knew.

"Then Hanson, we'll say, gets rid of the mechanic by feeding him doped liquor. It was unnatural for Hanson and the sergeant to go out together, in the first place, and more unnatural for the sarge to get so sick when Hanson wasn't bothered at all.

"That left Hanson and Hembrook alone in the ship, and Hanson with a parachute and a cold nerve that's famous in the flying game. A little thing like tapping Hembrook on the bean and then opening his parachute and doing a pull-off before the ship started down wouldn't be anything extraordinary for Hanson to do from the standpoint of the danger involved. In fact, it would be simple. And by that means Hembrook is artistically murdered and one of the ships they wanted to get rid of is smashed to smithereens by the same Machiavellian maneuver."

Don leaped to his feet, and started pacing up and down with those long steps of his, waving his cigaret-holder. That was his invariable symptom of interest or excitement.

"Slim, it sounds so right it scares me!" he said slowly. "And by the same token, I can't believe it, when I know I ought to."

"It's gospel, sor!" stated O'Flynn, with a sigh that sounded as if he had been holding his breath for a long time.

Hewitt's cigaret-butt was bobbing up and down slowly, as if he was nodding. It seemed as if swift excitement had been generated in all three of them, indicated by the sudden break in the absorbed passivity with which they had been lending their ears to my fanciful discourse.

"What next?" demanded Goodhue, dropping to the ground, cross-legged. "You say that the fracas this afternoon put you on the scent?"

"This is Daw's home town. He probably knows it inside out, or at least some sections of it. We are assuming that he wanted to destroy the ships. Murder and the destruction of one was forced on him, but it is my thought that the trip of factory men to Louisville had several reasons behind it. One, it was a pretty advertising stunt, and testified to the confidence of the builders in their own product. Second, it got them to Louisville, Daw's old stamping-ground, and enabled them to keep their fingers on the pulse of events, so to speak. And what town could be better suited for staging the disappearance of the below-par ships than Louisville, where Daw undoubtedly knows the ropes thoroughly?

"My ship, being their first sample and up to specifications, would probably be left alone. The other two were to be burned or something here. Now there's only one. Think about this: couldn't Daw have arranged for these men to come out here this afternoon and pick a scrap with the ship-guards? That would give them a chance to go away breathing threats. Then, if tonight, say, a couple of thugs should come along, knock the guard on the head, dump a little gasoline over the ship and burn it, what would everybody think? They'd think, and we would too, that a bunch of drunken roughnecks that got in a fight with us were just sore enough to pull the stunt to get even. Those fellows never would be caught, either. See how pretty it would be? Probably another gang would really do the work, with all those fellows who were here this afternoon having alibis if necessary. That is, if we were able to give a description accurate enough to catch any of them. They wouldn't figure on that, though—by masking the men who do the job tonight, say, the natural theory would be that our friends of the afternoon did it—and they'd never be caught, in all probability. We haven't much of a description. The alibi would just be an ace in a hole if we did locate any of them. It would be

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all to their advantage to have the theory held that they did do it."

"Slim, I shouldn't be surprized if every word you've emitted was gospel," Don said slowly. "If so, a little subterranean work on our part will enable us to bag those birds."

"Shure thing, sor!" stated O'Flynn, the hint of a chuckle in his voice. "Wouldn't it be gr-reat, now, if what the lootinint says was as near roight as we think?"

"I'm glad you all don't think I'm too crazy," I told them. "Always remember, though, that all this circumstantial evidence may not amount to a hill of beans, and that the long arm of coincidence has been stretched around us, so to speak. Here's what we'll do, though. It's after seven now, and we have a date with Daw and this party at eight-thirty, Don. We'll go back to town and tell him that we've just got a hurry call from Camp Henry to get out there and sign up some reports and things *pronto*, and hence can't join him this evening. That excuse will prevent him from getting the least bit suspicious, I figure, especially if we tell him frankly about the fracas this afternoon and show that we haven't the slightest suspicion that there was anything below the surface. After he and his party start off we'll beat it out here and see what turns up. We can tell him also that there's only one guard out here. We might start off for camp in his presence to make the apple sauce more appealing."

"Then, if they show up, we'll nab one or two of 'em, and worruk on 'em till they tell what they know, eh, sor?" inquired O'Flynn, who had been a different man since the fight.

He was sparkling all over, now.

"Exactly," Don cut in. "That stall about Camp Henry will be all right. Daw'll figure there are a lot of papers and reports in connection with Hembrook's death to make out, and it's a fact that Brad Norrison is going to take the body home either tomorrow or next day."

"—— if I haven't talked so much and so long that the whole thing seems nothing more nor less than the exact truth," I remarked as I got to my feet. "If nothing happens I'll be real disappointed!"

"So say we all of us!" chuckled Don. "I've always heard that this Louisville was a real town—and I yearn for a sample."

"Yes, sor!" said O'Flynn solemnly, and Hewitt's wide, thin mouth was smiling in the light of his glowing cigaret.

Flyers are funny, I guess—or they wouldn't be flyers.

IX

WE TOOK ten minutes to get our plan of campaign mapped out, and then Don and I started across the field for the trolley line which ran a quarter of a mile from the field. We were nearly to the road when a pair of big headlights swept around the curve and finally turned into the field. In a moment they were trained on us.

"So early, do you think?" enquired Don. "And our guns back at the hotel, too."

The car came to a stop a few feet in front of our blinking eyes. Then we heard Daw's voice.

"What are you doing way out here at this time of night?" he asked, getting out of the car. Women's giggles reached my ears as the big manufacturer came toward us. "The party is starting a little earlier than we planned, and I've been looking all over for you," he went as he came up to us. "Come over and meet the folks."

There were four girls and another man in the car. I couldn't get much of an idea regarding the beauty of the feminine contingent, but Don told me later that at least two of them were knockouts. The man, who was driving, was a tall, thin fellow in horn-rimmed glasses, and already slightly lit, although it was not yet eight o'clock. Daw, in evening dress, was his usual suave, smiling self.

"Don and I are sure desolated," I told the crowd after introductions were over, "but it's our tough luck. We can't join you tonight."

"Why not?"

It was Daw who asked the question, and his tone was like the snap of a whip.

"An hour or so ago we got a message from Camp Henry. We've got to go out there and sign some papers, reports and things—they're rushing things through on Hembrook in an effort to ship his body tomorrow," I told him. "An Army car will come after us at the hotel. In a way, it'll be better than rushing in tomorrow morning, I suppose, and possibly missing the Derby."

"I see," said Daw slowly. "I'll swear

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that's too bad. Sort of rips up what promised to be an enjoyable evening."

"I felt bad enough about it before, but since glimpsing this cloudburst of beauty and loveliness——"

Daw laughed, and girls' giggles supplied an obbligato.

"It's you boys' misfortune, all right. Well, girls, I'm sorry that after all I've been telling you you won't have a chance to find out for yourselves, but Slim and Don here are in the Army, you know, and they've got certain things they've got to tend to. You'll spend the night at camp, I suppose?" he added casually.

"Don't know—we may pull back into town late," I told him. I figured that if anything was scheduled to happen it might as well take place early.

"Well, hop in and we'll take you back to the hotel," said Daw, who was holding up nobly under the disappointment of our dereliction.

It was a pleasant ride we had back to town. One of the fair damsels sat on Don's lap, there being eight passengers in a seven-passenger car, and another one devoted herself to vamping me. She showed lots of practise. At the hotel we said good night, expressed our regrets once more, and went in to the jammed lobby. It seemed as if everybody in the world was in Louisville, and the town was going hog-wild. I've been in New Orleans during the Mardi Gras, in San Antone during the Fiesta San Jacinta, and I was hobbling along on crutches in Paris Armistice Day, but the night before the Derby in Louisville has them all stopped seven ways from Sunday. Due to my height Don and I were easily spotted, and inasmuch as the deaths of Harrik and Hembrook, particularly the latter, had received great publicity we found ourselves temporarily in the limelight. We escaped to our rooms immediately, however, got our guns, gave a bellboy a dollar to smuggle us down-stairs in the freight elevator, and then grabbed a taxi back out to the field.

O'Flynn and Hewitt were certainly on the job. We were challenged before we got within a hundred yards of the ships.

It had been settled beforehand that O'Flynn and Hewitt were to be the front line of defense, with Don and I in the cockpit of my ship. If any prospective raiders saw all four of us there we figured they'd give up the scheme, act innocent, and beat it. Consequently Don and I were to step in at the psychological moment, and after sewing up the party devote a little energy to extracting a confession.

The ships were drawn up on the edge of the field farthest from the road. Behind them was a small gulch and then a slope with a few trees thereon. Chances were that our expected visitors would drive up in a car, get out, and then pull their stuff with a suddenness that would make things easy—against unsuspecting guards.

"Too bad we didn't figure all this out before it got dark so we could have gone over my ship carefully and found out whether it really was built cheaply," Don remarked as we settled ourselves comfortably in the tiny cockpit.

"It would mean ripping up the linen all over it," I pointed out. "I wonder whether we should have called for police assistance."

"Why? Four of us, with guns—and too —— far-fetched a reason for being here to confide in the law. If we can't handle it we'd better resign and go to ribbon-clerking. These bozos won't be tough. They figure on a cinch, if any."

We waited and smoked and talked, and the longer we sat there the more bizarre and impossible the whole thing got to me. Funny how I vaccilated that way—when I was talking to the bunch earlier in the evening my whole theory seemed to dovetail perfectly and to be as believable as dawn or darkness, but as the quiet, pitch-black hours passed the whole fanciful basis on which our presence there was built seemed utterly impossible.

Occasionally a car would pass, but not very often. It was one o'clock by the illuminated dials of my wrist-watch the last time I remember looking. I guess both Don and I were nodding—we had hard days behind us. Perhaps Hewitt and O'Flynn had relaxed their vigilance a trifle, too. Anyway, I came to myself with a start as I heard O'Flynn's voice ring out:

"Halt! By ——, I'll shoot!"

There was a shot, then a thud, followed quickly by another.

"Two of 'em——"

I shot out the side-door in the fuselage, followed by Don. Looming dimly in the darkness, I could see four figures—and two on the ground. All four were bent over

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them and we had not been noticed. There was no car—the men must have sneaked up from behind and taken both mechanics by surprize.

My hand on Don's arm to keep him quiet, I hesitated a moment, and then, gun in hand, crept forward to get closer. Don was a trifle ahead of me. Apparently both O'Flynn and Hewitt had been knocked cold, for there was no resistance as the thugs tied them up.

Don and I had crept within ten feet of the whispering, busy group, and I was just preparing to make ready to begin to start to yell "Put 'em up!" when one of them, either by instinct or because he had heard us, straightened and turned like a flash. And without the delay of a split second there came the spat of a gun. Don went down as if felled with a club, a curse on his lips as he spun half around before hitting the ground. I remember that as I shot into the group I had the queer, dispassionate thought that there was at least one man of force and decisiveness in that bunch—if he had hesitated a second in shooting, either through surprize or fear, we'd have had them.

I was rewarded with a scream of pain, and then I got mine when it seemed as if a hot iron seared my right arm. My gun fell to the ground, clanging on a stone, and how I kept my feet I don't know.

With a rasping oath in a strangely familiar voice the man who had shot—a stocky fellow with a big head, and masked—jumped in. I was staggering, but my left arm swept around at his chin. In the split-second before his gun fell on my head and sent me to the ground my misdirected blow tore the mask partially from his face, and I got a view of the grim, dark, jeering face of test-pilot Hanson. The next instant I hit the ground in a burst of shooting stars.

I fought for consciousness, and lay motionless with closed eyes, as if absolutely out. It was a wicked strain for a moment, waiting for another blow, but it seemed that the ripping off of that mask had momentarily unnerved Hanson.

"He saw me, —— 'im," I heard him mutter. "Is Jerry hurt bad?"

"Dead!" came the whispered reply in a voice that trembled.

"The game's up," I heard Hanson say briefly. "That is, unless we croak 'em both."

"Not me!" interposed another voice hastily, and I recognized Bayzi, the Wop mechanic.

"Nor me," agreed Hanson in cool, even tones. "These fellows were wise to the whole thing or they wouldn't have been here. Bayzi, you can take your choice. I'm cranking up a ship and leaving for Canada right now. Billworth, they don't know you, and Jerry's dead. You're all right if you make tracks quick. What say, Bayzi?"

My head was gradually clearing, but I was still playing possum. I'll swear that even in that moment, when I knew that Don might be dead and that Ed Harrik and Hembrook were both corpses through the machinations of Hanson *et al*. I couldn't help but admire the cold-steel nerve of the man. That sardonic master-flyer and murderer might have been discussing the weather for all the emotion he showed.

"I go with you," stated Bayzi, his voice trembling.

"Beat it, Billworth. Leave Jerry here. You haven't been seen together have you? Not if you've obeyed orders, you haven't. You've got your dough, so you've got no kick. I wish I was in your shoes. Come on, Bayzi. Evans is out for the count, and so is Goodhue."

Billworth started at a run down toward the gully. I suppose they had a car out there somewhere on a back road. I heard Hanson and Bayzi pull the wheel blocks and climb in my ship. I was laying to one side of it, racking my brain for some way to get them. I didn't dare move, for from the cockpit they had a view of me; and besides, I didn't know where my gun was. Inwardly I was raging like a mad bull, and yet to move would have been fatal. There was not a sign of life anywhere. Apparently not a soul had heard the shots, and the pike running along the opposite side of the field was absolutely lifeless.

One motor sprang into roaring life, followed a moment later by another. Hanson had switched on the electric lights on the instrument board, and I could see both him and Bayzi unmasked, in the dim glow of the shaded bulbs. I decided to take a chance, and put into operation a more or less senseless plan which was the only possible method I could figure out for stopping them. Canada was only a little more than four hundred miles away, and

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they would have a cruising radius of over five hundred miles. By going very high, and screened by the darkness, they could come down in some out-of-the-way place and have a good chance to get away free and clear. In that moment I was willing to snap at anything which had even a possibility of success.

Watching them closely, I inched myself along, ready always to relapse into immobility if they looked around. I heard the pusher motor go on—by that time I was out of their line of vision, hidden by the gas tanks. I didn't dare hunt for my gun, or even to try to get Don's. He was still a motionless heap on the ground, and if anything was needed to harden my resolution it was the thought of that laughing, devil-may-care youngster who, if he was dead, had laughed as he died.

I was ten feet from the tail of the ship when the motors died away to idling. I knew that the next second or two would be my last chance. I had hoped that Hanson would take a long warm-up, but evidently he was afraid that the noise of the motors would attract onlookers. The exhaust pipes were shooting great plumes of sparks, and the Tankwing seemed like a monster of the night, breathing flame.

Suddenly there came a deafening roar, and it was all I could do to keep my feet as the propeller blast hit me like a ton of brick. I hurled myself forward, landing on the long horizontal stabilizer which connected the three rudders and vertical fins. I knew that Bayzi would be back between the gas tanks which had thus far screened me, but the pusher motor might shield me enough. I really had little conception of exactly what I wanted to do—it was rather an instinctive desire to foil those murderers which was so strong that it took no account of possibilities or cold, rational thinking. My mind was a red-tinted chaos.

I felt the tail come up as we sped over the ground. I kicked and clawed at the frail linen of two rudders, and tore at the stabilizer with my bare hands. I was braced against one fin, and the blast of the pusher kept me plastered there. It was perhaps fifteen seconds that we were on the ground, and as I worked desperately to dismantle the ship I waited for the motors to die away as they found their ship dismantled.

I had great holes in two rudders, and the wind whipped the rest of the linen from them. The stabilizer was partially smashed, and the linen was being ripped from that. Then I felt the ship leave the ground.

As if in a dream I saw the lights of cars along the road which was now to our left. We were ten feet high, and the ship was practically stalled. I hung on like grim death—and strangely enough I was exultant, and not afraid. Not afraid because for the moment I had no conception of my position—all I knew was that the Tankwing could never fly.

The first bank would tell the tale. Even now the ship was wabbling badly, and was not gaining an inch of altitude, due to the fact that the lifting surface of the stabilizer was partially gone. I could feel Hanson trying desperately to keep the nose up—and I knew that he'd have to bank in a moment, for tall trees were ahead. Perhaps he might not see them in the dark——

Then it came. He did bank—and of course the rudders were partially ineffective. The decreased lifting surface, plus the fact that the rudders were not effective enough to hold the ship in the bank, told the tale. The nose dropped, and that great three-motored plane slipped earthward on its side.

There was a second of unemotional, curious exaltation on my part, as the shadowed earth rose up to meet me. Instinctively I loosened up, and the second before we hit my arms flashed up over my face, and with my relaxed body in a ball I met that instant of crashing wood and tearing linen and shooting stars—and temporarily checked out of the picture.

X

THE next thing I remember is opening my eyes and then shutting them again because the light hurt them so badly. I was in bed, in white pajamas, and I was dizzy and sick and weak and feeling as if I was rapidly sliding down the balustrade of life into the ashcan of eternity. A few minutes later I opened my peepers again, and then shut them as I realized that in attempting to move my right arm I had discovered something like a mammoth aching tooth.

Finally I pried 'em open, and they focused on First Lieutenant Donald Goodhue, complete with cigaret-holder and cigaret. I cleared my throat hesitantly, and he looked

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up from the newspaper he was reading. I could see a big bunch of bandages around his left shoulder. Part of my nausea left me as I finally comprehended the fact that he was alive. He grinned and let the newspaper fall.

"When did you get back among us?" he inquired. "Ouch! —— this shoulder!"

"Just recently," I told him, and then my eyes took in the fact that we were in a small white room, and one whiff of the atmosphere told me that we were in a hospital.

"What's the damage?" I asked him.

"You've cracked a few spare-ribs and broken your right arm, as well as collected miscellaneous contusions, bruises, sores, bunions, wens and black and blue spots," he said cheerily. "I got efficiently drilled through the shoulder."

"How about O'Flynn and Hewitt and Hanson and——"

"Army, O. K. Hanson, extinct. Died in the crash you engineered. Bayzi, dead now, but he lived up until a couple of hours ago, and talked as he realized that he was close to the hallelujah strand. Daw, still loose but being hunted fluently."

I took all this in, chewed it for a moment, and then said:

"Tell me what happened."

"I was conscious, but incapable of much movement, when you lit on the ship. I saw what you were up to, and saw the crash. It was a beaut, and I don't know how you ever got out of it without being picked up with a blotter. A car happened to be passing, and the folks pulled you out, phoned town, and came over and got us. Within an hour all the road-houses, it seemed, were deserted for us. O'Flynn and Hewitt were tied up. That was funny, too. O'Flynn feels like —— about it. He says that those four must have sneaked up from behind, using one ship as a screen. They, like us, were looking for a car. He says four men just jumped at 'em without a word. He had a chance to shoot once, and then the bunch were all over 'em and our boys didn't have a chance.

"Well, I was about raving crazy until I found out you were still breathing a bit. Bayzi was badly mangled, but alive. Hanson was dead—the wheel got him plenty. We landed in this hospital, after I had mustered up energy enough to tell the forces of the law to spread a dragnet for Daw. That bird Billworth we heard talking must have got word to Daw, but I guess he'll be caught. He's got everybody after him. Bayzi talked—the Louisville police, aided by the Camp Henry bunch, sweated everything out of him. Besides he's religious and wanted the last rites and apparently felt as if he'd have a better shot at Paradise if he told what he knew.

"Daw killed Harrik when Harrik told him that night that he was going to tell the truth about the whole business. It was just luck that nobody happened to see him, and Daw has a silencer on his gun. Daw's servant—Daw helped the Chink in Mexico and has had a blind worshiper ever since—brought word to Hanson about it, and Hanson, Bayzi, and another man now under arrest in Eelyville were the ones to go through Harrik's stuff for any papers regarding the swindling on the ships. They got Harrik's gun, too, and framed the suicide. Harrik's body was carried to where it was found—he was killed in Daw's house.

"Bayzi said that the scheme was simply to burn the ships here in Louisville, and that on all future ships there was to be only the slightest of cheating, as he understood it. On these two he says there was practically nothing first-class used. He didn't know much about that end, but he did know that the factory simply had to clean up several thousand on 'em—which they couldn't do at the bid they made—to keep afloat. It seems evident that Daw didn't contemplate murder or anything anywhere near that strong. He was forced to the wall, and being far from a weak specimen, especially with that tiger Hanson in on the deal, he preferred to strong-arm the thing out rather than take his medicine.

"Bayzi wasn't in on Hembrook's death, exactly, but he said he was certain that Hembrook had suspected that the Tank-wings were not up to standard, and likewise had his suspicions about Harrik's death. Hanson, he said, simply knocked Hembrook on the head, after doping the mechanic back in Boundville, and then jumped.

"It looks as if Daw really started in this plane business legitimately, found that he couldn't keep afloat as long as the Government doesn't do a lick for civilian aviation, underbid on this big contract to try to save his bacon, figuring that by hook or crook he could get by. The fact that fairly common business cheating finally worked into

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murder was simply the result of the kind of man he is."

"And the game we were all playing," I agreed. "I think——"

Hasty footsteps came to our ears in the corridor, and a white-clothed, pleasant-faced young chap burst in the door.

"Morvich won the Derby!" he told us gleefully. "Paid four dollars and fifty cents to two dollars, too. Oh, glad to see you coming around, Lieutenant Evans."

I couldn't get him to talk about the race—he'd just heard the result over the wire—until he'd looked me over, fed me some vile stuff, called in a nurse to help him, and gone through other maneuvers. It was decreed that I remain quiet for a time, and consequently I was spared from newspapermen, Army investigators, the police, and the merely curious. At the end of four days I was feeling better, and Don was as chipper as a lark. Major Williamson and the newspapers gave us all information, between them. Everybody was rounded up except Daw and this Billworth. Daw's servant had absolutely refused to talk other than the reiterated statement that he knew nothing, had not seen Harrik the evening of his death, and that Daw had been home and in bed all night long. Even the arrest of three of Daw's foremen, and the fact that incontrovertible proof linked them with the projected swindle, failed to have any influence on this old Chink. Bayzi's signed deposition might have been so many words from the Farmer's Almanac for all the effect it had on him.

The eyes of the country were focused on Kentucky for a few days, watching the progress of the search for Daw. For some reason there had come a lull in murder—not a wife shot her husband for nearly a week and our little imbroglio was the principal item of criminal news. The fourth day in the hospital marked the start of Daw's downfall. The police discovered that he had been born in the mountains, and that his name had originally been Dawson, which is the moniker of almost as famous a feud family as the Chatfields, Calhouns and Ballardsons. They sent some men on the hunt who knew the mountains, and three days later came the clue which marked the end of the chase. Daw had taken cover beneath his family tree, and two days later he and his brother fell, in a little shack in the mountains, riddled with bullets. They had steadfastly refused to surrender, and two deputies were badly wounded before the posse of ten men finally shot them to pieces.

That's about all, I guess. They've found that the stockholders of the Greeley factory, other than Daw and Hanson, were absolutely in ignorance of what was going on, and that really the three foremen now under arrest were the only ones who had any inkling of the plot. That is, besides Bayzi, Hanson, Daw and Lathrop, who was the other man concerned in the events of the night when Harrik was killed.

Whether this Billworth, and the dead man, knew why they had been hired to help burn the Tankwing nobody knows. The Greeley factory has been reorganized, and is going through with the Tankwing contract. The Government has eased up a bit on it, I'm sure, and increased the ante a trifle. The private detective Daw hired as a blind has been exonerated—he was really trying to unravel the mystery, with no success.

Don is perfectly O. K. now, and I will be in another week, the doctors say. As soon as I'm pronounced sound in mind and limb Goodhue and I hike back to N. Y. to start south with another bunch of Tankwings. The one we had at Louisville was ripped apart up at the experimental field in Dayton. They found it was nothing but a big, frail kite—couldn't have cost forty thousand dollars, complete.

It's been nearly three months since it all happened—I was really banged up pretty bad—and in a week or two the Chink, Lathrop, and the foremen go to trial. What they'll get will be plenty, I presume. They're charged with everything from conspiracy to murder. That'll end the case, unless Billworth turns up. I've had plenty of time to think matters over, but I'll swear I can't get rid of the feeling that perhaps it was my dumbness that was partially responsible for the death of poor old Hembrook. I wish I had been one of these preternaturally brainy boys that fiction is full of—then I'd have had the whole thing solved, probably, by examining Ed's dinnercoat with a magnifying glass or something like that.

Instead of that, a big country boy had to muddle through as best he could. And that's every bit of it.

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Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

IN ACCORDANCE with Camp-Fire custom James K. Waterman rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Comrades, howdy. I was born in Boston. At the age of eight began my first adventure by commandeering a lobster-man's dory one night and setting sail (in company with a lad a year younger) for what was then known as the Sandwich Islands. Half-way across Massachusetts Bay we ran out of provisions and my crew mutinied. At this critical juncture a lobster smack swooped down and towed us home.

I SHALL start on my last great adventure with a chuckle if I am able, for a moment, to picture the owner of the dory as I saw him on the afternoon of our return. He was dancing up and down the beach in a most unseemly manner for a man of sixty-three, one leg of his patched trousers outside his cowhide boot, beating the air with his fists and yelling like a maniac. Nothing saved my crew and me from being drawn and quartered on the spot but the opportune dropping of his upper set of false teeth, his long thin nose in imminent danger of being engulfed in the roaring cavern beneath. While he was fishing his teeth out of the sand we vanished homeward. Selah.

Eight years later shipped with J. William R. Wing of New Bedford for a whaling voyage in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Was thirty-nine months on that cruise. Then the merchant service. In the intervals beach-combing on the East coast of Africa; Chile; mate of a South Sea trader (the *Luka*); newspaper work in Cape Town and J'burg (too many rules); special service for U. S.; back to the merchant service and just at present I'm ashore in sight of San Francisco Bay for a while.

THIS is all about myself but I wish you would let me talk whale for a few minutes. A writer (I've forgotten his name and also the name of his book) has stated that the whale is the most harmless critter in the whole universe. Aforesaid whale being nothing more or less than an immense, sluggish mass of fat waiting out there in the ocean for some one to come up and stick him. Aha! Wait a minute, comrades, till I hone me iron; let him rant.

This wise knight of the keys further states that all these tales of hair-breadth escapes from infuriated whales are mere figments of some Ananias with designs on the shore-going public. Wise guy, that. All right, my iron's ready.

There is no question but that the baleen whale, such as the Greenland, the Right, the Blue, etc., are naturally timid and rarely put up a fight. But the giant sperm whale with his twenty-eight foot walking-beam of a lower jaw, armed with 43 sturdy ivory carrots nine inches long is, as many a vacant chair in the home of a whaling town can testify, the

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wickedest fighter in the world. The writer quoted made the mistake by saying *all* whales.

Out here in the West we have a black bear so mild and inoffensive that it is a common saying: "Ye kin walk up an' kick him in the stummick."

A certain tourist, hearing this, forthwith conceived a supreme contempt for *all* bears.

The neighbors shipped back to the tourist's widow all that they could find of his remains, bearing this tag:

"He kicked a grizzly in the guts."—JAMES K. WATERMAN.

SAYS Bill Adams as to his story in this issue:

The description of the moonlight blow, in "Petrels," is from life. It was a grand night, that night in the Sargasso weed, when we lost a full suit of sails in a quick shift of wind from sou' west to nor' west. Many of us worked aloft day-naked.—BILL ADAMS.

And, while we have Bill Adams up before us, here's a letter to him from one of you:

France Field, Canal Zone,
Republico of Panama.

Bill Adams: I'm sorta electing you to write up this Associated Press dispatch of June 28, 1922. (I think that was the date):

"New York.—The master of an incoming vessel reports sighting a four-foot model of a full-rigged ship, sailing steadily along about 700 miles West of the Irish coast."

Between you and me, I believe said master had the soul of a louse not to have taken any steps to recover the model ship and found out all about it. But I believe that there are endless possibilities for a real tale of the sea in the fact of a full-rigged model being afloat in that part of the Atlantic.—LIEUT. ROLAND BIRNN, Mng. Editor *Airco News*.

THE panther's scream. Mr. Van Depoele's letter was called forth by Raymond S. Spears' story "Lonesome." Personally I note with much interest what Mr. Spears says about John Burroughs *vs.* Ernest Thompson-Seton. Do others of you, who are qualified to judge, hold the same opinion?

Long Beach, California.

Dear friends of the Camp-Fire: In the February 10 number Raymond S. Spears writes a story of a cougar. I have never met Mr. Spears but I know that he is a brave man, for if he were not he would never have dared to make his cougar scream, to say nothing of permitting him to make friends with a human.

WRITERS of a few years ago used to endow wild animals with great powers, both mental and physical. In fact they went so far that many of their stories were hard to believe. The pendulum seems now to be swinging in the other direction and there appears to be a growing tendency, not only to discredit these old stories, but to deny our wild friends some of the natural peculiarities which they actually possess. Some of these ultra modern sophists brand as bugaboos our old, time-honored belief in the ferociousness of the bear, the sneaking meanness of the wolf and the catamount and the scream of the panther.

Let them say that they have never heard a panther scream. That they do not think that a panther screams, or even go so far as to claim that the panther does not scream. But when they ridicule those who believe that the panther screams as some have done—then I want to get right up on my hind legs and snort.

IT MAY be more or less natural that many people should believe that a panther never screams. I have known men who have lived all their lives in the mountains, men who have shot and trapped many panthers, who have never heard one scream. So I believe that they scream but seldom.

I have hunted in several parts of California where they were plentiful. I have had one or more come into my camp at night in the Santa Barbara National Forest and in the Siskiyou Mts. And in Madera County I think I heard one scream. But one night in North Carolina, on Mt. Pisgah, I saw one and heard him scream while I was looking at him. So, in spite of what anybody may say, I know that one panther, painter, cougar, mountain-lion or whatever you wish to call him, screamed once.

I WAS sleeping in the ranger cabin in a little flat known as the Pink Beds on the side of Mt. Pisgah on the George Vanderbilt estate, when I was awakened by the ——est screaming I had ever heard in my life. There is no other way to describe it than to say that it sounded like a woman in mortal fear, only more so. It had a quality that for a time froze me and made the hair at the back of my neck feel all prickly. I lay in the bunk trying to make sure that I was awake and not dreaming. Then came another sound that sounded like a baby crying muffled in a blanket.

Finally I was able to get out of bed and look out of the window. It was a moonlight night, as clear as day. As I looked out across the pasture and vegetable garden with its fine crop of tall weeds, in the direction of the barn which was something over a hundred yards away, I noticed that the horses were snorting and kicking. Everything else was quiet. Then I made out our chickens and turkeys roosting in the trees at the edge of the pasture. They were not making a sound but seemed to be mighty uneasy, huddling closer and stretching their necks 'round kind of foolish like.

I next made out a movement in the weeds of the garden. Something was crossing toward the pasture. Now I made out what looked like a long, fat snake above the weeds, lashing about like the tail of a cat when said cat is about to pounce on a bird. This lasted for some minutes, then out from the weeds into the clear moonlight of the pasture crept a big tawny cat. And it was some cat. It was what I should consider an unusually large mountain lion.

FOR quite a while he squatted low to the ground, his tail lashing about and his head turning from side to side as he took in the lay of the land. When he seemed satisfied he raised his front quarters a little, tilted his head back and let out that terrible scream, long and quavering. I could see his lower lip tremble. He did not open his mouth and show his teeth as he is shown in the pictures. He did about as a dog does when baying the moon.

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Two or three times he repeated the scream and then the answer came from 'way up on the mountain-side, the crying of a baby. That long continued, half muffled sobbing.

I take it for granted that that was the lady panther answering her mate.

These things I saw and heard so I have an unbreakable faith in the panther's scream, but of course there are some who will say that I am not a "trained observer."

And I am not alone. I can give the names of quite a few men who have heard the panther scream.

Trust that I have not taken up too much of your time, but I feel that the question is quite important, for soon there will be no more panthers.—HENRY M. VAN DEPOELE.

Alvin, Texas.

I was right glad to read Van Depoele's letter. I know the question raised about the cougar's screaming, but the evidence, including that of the scalpel, is conclusive. The description of the act, in this letter, is the best I have ever read.

ALSO, the cougar—"panther"—does walk with humans. I don't know how many clippings I have of "terrible adventures," "narrow escapes," with the well-meaning and friendly cats. The story of "Lonesome" was based on these characteristic narratives.

My interpretation of the cougar's mind is not even imagination. When the Spanish in the Argentine during the first colonization had trouble with one young woman, they put her out for the jaguars to kill and eat. They heard the huge brutes come. But in the morning the young woman was still alive, a fact that led to the sins or trespasses being forgiven.

She declared—I quote from memory—that at the coming of night a cougar—panther—appeared. The animal patroled around, and when a jaguar came hungrily and tried to attack the human, the cougar fought and drove the man-eater away. Jaguars are a different proposition from the cougar. I am far from my authorities, and can not quote direct.

I am inclined to believe that the attack by John Burroughs on the artist and naturalist, Ernest T. Seton, charging nature-faking, delayed a real understanding of wild life by many years. Apparently jealous spleen at the great success of Seton's epochal work led to it. Certainly all that Burroughs wrote contained less understanding of the spirit of the outdoors than Seton's story of the wolf *Lobo*.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS.

IN "The History of the Victoria Cross," by Philip A. Wilkins, published in 1904 (a copy of which one of you—F. P. Merritt, presented to the office some ten years ago), there is the following item:

William Seeley (Seaman), H.M.S. *Euryalus*, Royal Navy—Decorated for his intelligence and conspicuous courage at the attack on the batteries and defences of Simonisaki, in Japan, on September 6, 1864. This seaman went ashore first and ascertained quite alone the strength and position of the enemy, his valuable information and services being specially mentioned by Lieutenant Ewardds, commanding the Third Company. Later, when our sailors charged the position, he led them with great gallantry, even though he had been previously wounded.

I'm bringing it up because one of the other fellows found written at the side of the above, in my handwriting, the following note:

"An American citizen at the time and always."

Unfortunately, my poor memory does not recall the circumstances, but presumably one of you wrote giving sufficiently satisfactory evidence to warrant making the notation. That Seeley was an American is to a degree borne out by the fact that Seeley is an old New England name and that the photograph of William Seeley, published with the item, is by Kivlan, Leominster, Mass.

On the other hand it is the usually accepted fact that only Englishmen are to have or can receive the Victoria Cross. Any one serving in the English Army or Navy is supposed to swear the oath of allegiance to the British Empire. There have doubtless been exceptions but very few of them. The only ones I know about are the cases of the original of Talbot Mundy's *Jimgrim* and of William Ashley Anderson, formerly of our staff, who served through the British East African campaign.

Possibly some one in Leominster, or some one who knows the facts of the Seeley case, can straighten us out.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine C. M. Sublette follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself:

Denver, Colorado.

A few lines for the Camp-Fire—not that there's much to tell, but will begin at the beginning:

BORN in Illinois and raised in Indiana, I have wandered a good bit over the West and am so pleased with it that I am still wandering and planning further meanderings for more years than the ordinary man ever lives. There are so many places that interest me! Forebears? Good old American stock for three hundred years, although the original paternal stem sprang from the soil of La Belle France and the maternal from the "right little, tight little, isle."

Experience? Yes, lots of it! Both pleasant and unpleasant. Chronologically speaking, here it is—railroading, electric railroading, a little construction work, some trade journal work, sugar factory work (in a moment of temporary mental abberation and financial stress—never again), farming and at present doing my best to help the farmer tease a

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few heads of lettuce from ground that never saw lettuce before. Occasionally also, I pursue the elusive "spud" when the season is such that any loose shekels may be garnered by such pursuit. This is not such a season, however, but this work carries me into the mountains where I gather some good material.

HOBBIES? Western history from the time of the Conquistadors; out-doors; herding a flivver through the impressive grandeurs of the Rockies. Ambitions? To write a really accurate trilogy of novels on the fur trade, the cattle business and the modern west. Pleasures? The society of the Lady Who Honored Me, who is a helpful and understanding companion; and The Skipper, almost nine and of the feminine persuasion, but a skipper nevertheless, who runs the boat and has only one fault as an officer—she's a bit too familiar with the crew. Also I hunt anything that is shootable or hookable.

Otherwise—I don't know any more, except that I am glad to be a member of the large and interesting circle about the Camp-Fire, whose many intersting screeds I have read these many years.—C. M. SUBLETTE.

THOSE of you who have been reading *Adventure*, some of you since 1910, know that it very carefully refrains from praise of its own fiction, from all the self-advertising usual among magazines. Even to ordinary paid advertising in other publications it resorts practically not at all. Instead it is content to devote itself quietly to the business of getting the best fiction it can. As to the merits of that fiction it has left its readers to form their own judgment, without "assisting" them to an opinion. Because of the emphatic endorsement of that judgment and because *Adventure*, having long since wiped out the barriers of formality between readers and editors, has learned the value of its readers' advice and friendly co-operation, I'm now putting before you the results of this policy of not blowing our own horn.

We have no intention of changing that policy, but the results are both bad and good and the bad results need correcting—with your help. By an automatic process of selection it has gathered as readers those who form their own opinions instead of accepting the opinions of others and who test a thing itself instead of going by appearances or following the general herd. As an automatic result of that automatic selection, its audience is drawn from all ranks of society, probably the most thoroughly cosmopolitan magazine audience in existence. The independent character of this audience has been the more sharply defined because *Adventure* has consistently chosen its material and shaped its policy on the principle that a magazine custom, like any other, is not necessarily worth following merely because others are following it. Our object has been the single one of getting good stories, regardless of what fads and temporary standards may prevail at the moment. Naturally the readers attracted by such a policy are equally independent of fads and temporary standards.

UNFORTUNATELY most readers of fiction, however literary they may consider themselves, are *not* independent in their literary judgment. Indeed, the louder their claim to culture and high literary standards, the more likely are they to accept other people's standards and opinions without doing any thinking of their own. Of these *Adventure* can not hope to attract any considerable part until they have been solemnly told by generally accepted authorities that it has merit worthy their attention. That will come in time, we believe—indeed the pendulum has already begun to swing in that direction, but the pendulums of literary popularity swing slowly and in any case our problem is not concerned with this class as a whole.

Our problem has to do with only those fiction-readers who do have independent literary judgment and who do know the difference between good fiction and bad but who do not read *Adventure*. Because of certain reasons there are many of them. This is a man's magazine and the some fifteen per cent. of women readers seems as high a proportion of the gentler sex as we should expect. Its fiction is chosen for solid merit, not for superficial glitter; those who prefer mere surface cleverness and jingling brightness will look elsewhere. It is a clean magazine and will never attract those who prefer salacious or sexy fiction. It gives little space or emphasis to the love-element and will not draw those who prefer that element. It strives for a sound basis of reality and reliable fact in its stories and can not lure those who seek the fantastic and bizarre. It does not deal with the effete, morbid or degenerate; those who believe that realism means wallowing in the gutter will not find what they want in *Adventure's* pages.

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ALL these possible readers we are content to do without. *Adventure* will remain a clean, wholesome magazine and a man's magazine. But there is another class of readers, a large class who do not read *Adventure*, and it is here that we want your help.

This class does not read *Adventure because they will never look at it.* They don't know what's inside; they would like it if they knew, but they won't look at it.

They won't look at it because, to them, it is only one of "those cheap popular fiction magazines." They don't read any cheap popular fiction magazines, either because they've always considered that whole class beneath the notice of any one possessing any kind of literary standards or because at some time in the past they've experimented with some of them and happened to find fiction that entirely failed to appeal to them. These people have literary judgment, like clean fiction, ought to be readers of *Adventure*, but don't read it because they haven't the faintest idea of what is really in it. They've never looked to see.

For example, I'm often amused by people who enthusiastically urge me to read some book that originally appeared serially in *Adventure*. "Captain Blood," by Rafael Sabatini, happened to bring me quite a number of such recommendations and the looks of utter surprize and amazement upon learning it had first been published in *Adventure* were concrete proof of how many would like *Adventure* stories if they read them instead of refusing to look at them. And it is only one case out of thousands. For years we've had a steady dribble of letters from people saying they'd "never looked at the blamed magazine until so-and-so made me or such-and-such happened. Believe me, I'm a reader from now on." There are plenty of people who would read it if something happened to start them, but only a small proportion of them happen to get started. They know good fiction when they see it, have independent judgment, are open-minded, but they never even pick up a copy of *Adventure*.

IN A way they are entirely justified. Whether or not deservedly, "cheap popular fiction magazines" have a bad name among people of literary discrimination and quite naturally they class *Adventure* along with all the rest. It is printed on cheap paper, its name is sensational, its covers, however well done, carry out the idea of stories that are merely "exciting." Its policy is to find new authors; being new, these people have not yet heard of them or read about them, and, when these new writers become famous, they do not know that they first appeared in *Adventure* and are still appearing there. (Take this same example of Rafael Sabatini, for instance; his stories were appearing in *Adventure* as far back as some ten years ago and will continue to appear in the future.)

Then there is the other class of readers who do not have literary judgment of their own but are guided entirely by what other people tell them and by surface appearances. They are even more prone than the first class to "judge a book by its covers" and refuse even to pick up a magazine with such a title and printed on such unfancy paper, let alone being seen with it in their possession!

IT IS on these two classes that we want your help. We want that help *now* because the tide has already begun to turn in our favor and effort put forward now will produce more results than it could ever have done in the past. Even without these two classes, *Adventure* is gaining, not losing, in circulation, but here is an opportunity to add new readers in big bunches. A friend who deals with many important people in Washington tells me that he began to notice that whenever talk at a dinner or informal meeting turned to magazine reading most of those present had never read *Adventure* and sniffed at the idea of ever reading it, but that there was always at least one person present who rose up on his hind legs and straightway preached *Adventure* to them and that he was always the type of man whose opinion carries weight. With the result that the others decided to give it a trial. That's all we ask. Not every one will like any magazine. We'll be content if every one gives our magazine a chance. My friend became so interested that he made a regular practise of himself bringing up the subject of magazines at every gathering where such discussion was possible. At last reports he had not found an occasion when the majority had ever looked at it or when there was not at least one strong advocate to preach it to them.

There are many similar instances and

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many other proofs that the tide is beginning to turn in our direction. And it is being turned by the slow but sure hand-to-hand method, by individual readers who pass the word along. I know well how many of you have "rooted" for our magazine for years. The handicaps of appearances are difficult to overcome, but the results of that "rooting" are beginning to show strongly. It is because this seems the psychological moment that I'm thus frankly asking your help in getting people to *try Adventure for themselves* instead of passing it by because of appearances or preconceived ideas.

THE chief obstacle is our cheap paper. It's cheap because *Adventure* is in no way dependent upon its advertising for support, as are most of the best known magazines, but is a product that stands on its own feet, costing so much, sold for enough more to give legitimate profit. It needs no advertisements at all and for years carried none. On the same solid merchandise basis most of our largest and best known magazines could not exist. As merchandise, most of them cost more to manufacture and sell than the reader pays for them. If *Adventure* used highly calendered paper like theirs it would no longer be sufficiently profitable to warrant its continuing on the same solid, independent basis. It would certainly not be able to buy so good a grade of fiction.

But our cheap paper is the chief reason why so many will not even pick up the magazine. Most Americans are subject to the idea that unless a thing is and looks expensive it is inferior. *Adventure* printed on coated paper would at once jump up amazingly in sales. The coated paper alone would, to many, be sufficient endorsement. Most of them are not open to the "rough diamond" idea. Ask them whether Shakespeare printed on cheap wrapping-paper would cease to be literature or whether Turgeniev or Emerson would cease to be good reading if printed on news stock. They would answer no, but if they'd never heard of these writers they'd never even look at them if printed on paper like ours. You explored, knew a good thing when you found it and abided by your own judgment regardless of where or on what the good thing was found. They won't. They need the endorsement of your judgment before they will leave the beaten track.

NATURALLY what I ask you to give them is your own judgment, not mine, but for your convenience we've collected *facts* that you can use as you see fit.

It will be difficult, I think, to get over to an outsider an idea of what our Camp-Fire is like, of how closely the readers "sit in" on shaping the magazine's policy or of the good feeling and friendliness among readers, writers and editors. These things they may have to find out for themselves by trial, rather than by advance description. Much the same for all our service departments, except where it happens that one of them will serve a particular need of a "prospect." There are those, however, to whom *Adventure* would appeal because of its Americanism and its belief in real democracy. The country is full of Americans as tired of existing political and sociological conditions as they are disgusted with the extreme remedies of the ultra-conservatives and the ultra-radicals.

The cleanness and wholesomeness of *Adventure* is a good talking point. Many are sick of erotic and neurotic fiction. Many jump at the conclusion that *Adventure* is "sensational" and bad for young folks—some because they've never looked to see, some because vice sufficiently gilded and sugar-coated is acceptable to them while wholesome, matter of fact recognition of the existence of evil in the world is immoral. They approve fiction so delicately handled that one hardly realizes it leaves behind it an unethical impress or that what he really reads it for is its salacious appeal. Yet in *Adventure's* clean pages they find, or imagine, unwholesomeness! The Y. M. C. A. seem pretty generally to keep it off their reading-tables as unfit for the young, and certainly during the war there was a strong tendency, to put it mildly, to keep it from our boys over there as too rough and low for them, while the Y. freely transmitted to them "recognized" magazines I would try to keep out of my son's or daughter's hands as I would the plague. I venture I can walk into any Y. M. C. A. reading-room and pick up a half-dozen magazines with more salacious appeal and more general unwholesomeness than can be found in *Adventure* for thirteen

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years back into the past and thirteen years forward into the future.

Not that you should waste any time on the Y. M. C. A. Personally I'd much rather not have it on their reading-tables, but they serve as an extreme example of the moral judgment gone awry that sometimes does injury to our magazine among those who do not know it. Your testimony as to its cleanness is heavy in our letter-files, including a generous number of endorsements from Protestant and Catholic clergy. Will you testify to others as well as to us?

ITS educative value is another talking-point, as your letters show. How much have you learned about American history from its pages, how much of history in general? What has it done for your knowledge of geography, of your fellow men at home and all over the world? What has it done to develop your sympathy and understanding?

There is, I think, one point that surely should be made to any one with whom you talk about *Adventure*. Akin to the cheap paper complex is the remarkable idea that only "roughnecks" read it. I don't know precisely what they mean by "roughnecks" or whether their idea is that a man has to have on a stiff, white collar before he is competent to judge fiction, but their general notion seems to be that *Adventure's* readers are much, much inferior to themselves in culture and education. Don't argue with them. Just ask them to inquire around in their own circles—or in better circles, find out what people do read *Adventure*, and note the standing of these people and their opinion of the magazine.

AS TO fact data in general here are some that may be useful ammunition:—

(1) *Adventure* was founded for the express purpose of providing relaxation reading for people of intelligence and good taste in fiction, people who in their leisure moments desire stories that will take them out of themselves, giving change, refreshment and entertainment, stories that move swiftly and sometimes stir the pulse, yet stories not heavy with "problems" and stories so well done that the reader's enjoyment is not spoiled by crudity and poor workmanship. It was (and is) aimed at a double audience—at the sophisticated who for their regular diet turn to the *Atlantic*, the reviews, the accepted best in the world's books, and at those of simple tastes who may read very little else or who may read the best there is and still retain their liking for the big, simple, wholesome things of out-of-doors that appeal to manly men. Stating it another way, *Adventure* was founded in the belief that the best literature runs hand in hand with simplicity, genuineness and solid reliability.

(2) To get a standard of comparison we chose the nine that seem the accepted best among general magazines publishing fiction —*Atlantic*, *Century*, *Collier's*, *Everybody's*, *Harper's*, *Pictorial Review*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Scribner's*, *Smart Set*. Going over our present list of authors contributing to *Adventure*, we found that, despite many of them being new writers discovered by us and not yet having had time to win recognition generally, our writers have contributed to the above nine magazines some 308 short stories, 84 articles and essays, 4 serials and 3 novelettes. In the case of poems to the above nine magazines we added others known for their good poetry or for their reproduction of the best poems in other publications—*Bookman*, *Contemporary Review*, *Literary Digest*, *Measure*, *Nation*, *New Republic*, *New York Tribune*, *Poetry*. To these seventeen publications *Adventure* writers have contributed 227 poems. The data were secured through a questionnaire to 86 *Adventure* authors.

Of the serials one was in *Century*, one in *Everybody's*, two in the *Post*. Of the short stories 94 in *Post*, *Collier's* 74, *Everybody's* 67, *Pictorial* 22, *Smart Set* 22, *Century* 9, remainder scattering.

The above from current *Adventure* writers, remember. Our policy is to find and develop new and unknown writers. After they make their mark in *Adventure* the other magazines go after them, some of them offering prices we can not attempt to meet and some of our writers leaving us in consequence, though others, despite solicitation, stay with us year after year. Some authors, of course, appear in our magazine as in many others. Of our current authors not all who received our questionnaire have yet replied or the totals would be still larger. Among those (fiction only) questioned were: Bill Adams, William Ashley Anderson, H. C. Bailey, F. R. Bechdolt, Pierre Benoit, Konrad Bercovici, John

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Buchan, Captain Dingle, J. Allan Dunn, Crosbie Garstin, Beatrice Grimshaw, Wilbur Hall, Harold Lamb, Eugene P. Lyle, Jr., Gregory Mason, Talbot Mundy, Lynn Montross, Frederick Moore, Leonard H. Nason, Hugh Pendexter, Michael J. Phillips, Roger Pocock, Rafael Sabatini, Robert Simpson, A. D. H. Smith, T. S. Stribling, W. C. Tuttle, Albert R. Wetjen, Gordon Young.

IF WE go back into the past, here are some former *Adventure* writers whose names are now generally known: Frederick Irving Anderson, Marion Polk Angellotti, Bertram Atkey, Charles Neville Buck, Bozeman Bulger, Ellis Parker Butler, Thomas P. Byron, Edward Childs Carpenter, Agnes and Egerton Castle, Stephen Chalmers, Octavus Roy Cohen, Lincoln Colcord, Will Levington Comfort, Courtney Ryley Cooper, Coningsby Dawson, William Harper Dean, Warwick Deeping, Louis Dodge, James Francis Dwyer, Hulbert Footner, Granville Fortescue, Hugh S. Fullerton, Eleanor Gates, Jackson Gregory, Sir Rider Haggard, Donal Hamilton Haines, C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne, Charles Tenney Jackson, Calvin Johnston, Frank Goewey Jones, Albert Kinross, Frederick Arnold Kummer, Peter B. Kyne, Maurice Leblanc, Leverett Samuel Lyon, Peter Clark MacFarlane, Crittenden Marriott, Grace Sartwell Mason, John L. Mathews, Hudson Maxim, Cleveland Moffett, Gouverneur Morris, George Jean Nathan, Baroness Orczy, Henry Oyen, Augustus Post, E. Alexander Powell, Hesketh Pritchard, Arthur B. Reeve, Robert Wells Ritchie, Charles G. D. Roberts, Theodore Goodridge Roberts, Arthur Somers Roche, Kermit Roosevelt, Henry C. Rowland, George A. Schreiner, Dr. H. de Vere Stacpoole, Wilbur D. Steele, Albert Payson Terhune, Harold Titus, Edgar Wallace, Carolyn Wells, William Patterson White, Honoré Willsie. Among the poets: Bill Adams, Katherine Lee Bates, Berton Braley, Archie Austin Coates, Mary Stewart Cutting, Mary Carolyn Davies, Glenn Ward Dresbach, Richard Butler Glaenzer, Joseph Mills Hanson, Harry Kemp, H. H. Knibbs, Ethel Watts Mumford, John V. A. Weaver, Oscar Williams.

If these, too, had been questioned, the score of appearances in those nine magazines would have been trebled or quadrupled.

(3) The following list of stories published serially in *Adventure* that afterward appeared in book form will serve also to answer the queries that always come in from you on this point. Bear in mind that *Adventure* stories have in them little of the love-element, that book publishers have a prejudice against stories lacking this element, that many *Adventure* stories are therefore barred from book publication on this one count alone and that those attaining it do so because their merit is so pronounced that it over-rides this obstacle. The list is not a complete one, full data not being quickly attainable. In such cases as Hugh Pendexter and Talbot Mundy other stories printed by us will appear as fast as book publishing schedules permit.

Frederick R. Bechdolt: "When the West Was Young," Century. J. Allan Dunn: "Turquoise Cañon" Doubleday, Page; "Rotorua Rex," "The Petals of Lao Tse," Skeffington. Crittenden Marriott: "Via Berlin" ("Protectors of the Peace"), Shores. Talbot Mundy: "Rung Ho!" ("For the Peace of India") Scribners; "Winds of the World," "Hia Singh," "The Ivory Trail" ("On the Trail of Tippoo Tib"), "Told in the East" (collection); "The Guns of the Gods," Bobbs, Merrill. Arthur O. Friel: "Tiger River," "The Pathless Trail," Harpers. Hugh Pendexter: "Kings of the Missouri," "A Virginia Scout," "Pay Gravel," Bobbs, Merrill; "Red Belts," "Gentlemen of the North," Doubleday, Page. Kathrene and Robert E. Pinkerton: "Penitentiary Post," Doubleday, Page. Robert Simpson: "The Gray Charteris," McCann, Hodder & Stoughton. Arthur D. Howden Smith: "The Audacious Adventures of Miles McConaughy," Doran; "Claymore," Skeffington; "The Doom Trail," "Beyond the Sunset," Brentano. F. St. Mars: Ten books of short stories, including most of the many printed by us. English publication. John Buchan: "The Path of A King," Doran, "The Diamond Pipe" ("Prester John"), Dodd, Mead. Beatrice Grimshaw: "Nobody's Island," Doubleday, Page. Ranger Gull: "The Air Pirate" ("Wolves of the Air"), Harcourt, Brace. Rafael Sabatini: "The Sea Hawk," "Captain Blood," Houghton Mifflin. Gordon Young: "Savages," "Wild Blood," Bobbs, Merrill. Pierre Benoit: "L'Atlantide," Duffield. T. S. Stribling: "The Web of the Sun," Swedish publication. "Fombombo," Century. William Patterson White: "Lynch Lawyers," Little, Brown; "Paradise Bend," "Hidden Trails," Doubleday, Page. S. Carleton: "The La Chance Mine Mystery" ("The Secret Wolf"), Little, Brown. Samuel Alexander White: "The Foaming Fore Shore," Doubleday, Page. Corine and R. A. Tsanoff: "Pawns of Liberty," Outing. Arthur A. Nelson: "Wings of Danger," ("The Adventurers") McBride. Henry Oyen: "The Snow Burner," "Gaston Olaf," "The Man Trail," Doran.

To show properly the standing of *Adventure* authors a list of all books published by

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them, whether they appeared first in our magazine or not, should be given, but such a list would fill pages of space and any one not familiar with *Adventure* must be referred to the list of the authors' names and his own knowledge of their general standing.

(4) To a certain extent the value of our departments is easily shown to a stranger. If, for example, he will look at several issues of "Camp-Fire" he is likely to find it difficult to classify those who talk there as a "low-brow" bunch and to find that he can learn from them a good deal on a surprizingly large range of worth-while subjects. The practical, information value of "Ask Adventure" is apparent at a glance, particularly if it is explained that those in charge are really authorities of first-hand knowledge. "Lost Trails," averaged over nine years, finds eleven per cent. of those sought, a surprizingly high average considering how many resort to it only after having tried police, detectives, newspapers and all other channels and considering that we are doubtless not informed of the finding in a good many cases. Our Stations, too, make a splendid example of the spirit of comradeship and helpfulness that has grown up among us. So does our custom of having each new writer introduce himself to Camp-Fire, and our writers' custom of taking us all into their confidence as to any interesting facts connected with the material, etc., they use in our stories. Identification-cards, mail service, etc., any of these will have its appeal to some.

(5) To some there will be appeal in the fact that our magazine works definitely for better citizenship and democracy, contending for the rights of the American people as a whole, not for any class, party or faction of them. It might also be pointed out that our magazine itself organized the original American Legion, endorsed by Theodore Roosevelt, ex-President Taft, General Leonard Wood and many others of our most prominent men, which later formally turned over its name to the great organization now bearing it—the name originated by our magazine.

This is frankly a campaign to reach a new class of readers; we may ask your help again later. Why are we doing this? "To increase circulation," some of you will say. Yes, largely, but not entirely. We are enlisting your aid because we believe that *Adventure* through Camp-Fire and in its departments as well as in its fiction has something of value to a greater number of people; a frank friendship, a simple honesty of opinion between men; a meeting-place where one can get back to fundamental things, too far lost sight of in a land where minority fights minority and issues are obscured in a cloud of passion and prejudice. In a word, the spirit of fellowship and trust.

That is what we on the staff believe *Adventure* stands for; it is an ideal which raises our jobs above one of mere magazine-making; it is why we are asking your help. Propaganda if you will. It is the only propaganda we are interested in.—A. S. H.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom A. I. MacNamee rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Comrades of 71: Sounds like some sort of revolutionary war propaganda, doesn't it? Well, it isn't. It's just a greeting from a puzzled human who has a job to do and doesn't know how to do it.

You see, I have been told that I must stand up and speak to you all about myself, and I can't seem to make the words come right. *That* is the *one* subject I am thoro'ly familiar with, and I'm not usually backward about tooting my own horn, but—Gosh, it's a job!

NOW, for the dirty work. I was born in 1883, in a small town, where nothing ever seems to happen. Early in life I became an actor. No, I won't tell you how good I was, but I WAS good, just the same.

Any way, the shows kept going broke, which forced me to hunt jobs all over the blooming continent to fill in until I could get another engagement. The show business was only a starter, for it gave me a taste of wandering, and I have never gotten over the longing to go—somewhere, anywhere, just so it was a move to be made.

I have been a newspaper man. Stock salesman. Promoter. Oil man. Prospector. Hunter. Done a little soldiering. Worked in a drug-store. Was a tailor for a while. Sold almost everything that's sellable. Worked at longshore, factories, farming, etc., etc., *ad lib.* And I'm still going strong.

Gathered the material for "Gold" while on a prospecting trip into the "Rice Lake" district of Manitoba, Canada, and I'm telling you, folks, she's *some* good country and plumb full of good people.

MY PEOPLE are Americans, thank goodness. You can see that I'm proud of it, and I *am*, for there's no better people on the face of the earth than the American people who set their minds and hearts behind their Americanism and try to make it a thing to be proud of.

Yes, this is propaganda, but it applies equally to the people of any other nation, for a man of any nation who is not proud of that nation, and of his citizenship in it, is a poor sort of critter that I can't cotton to.

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Don't misunderstand me. Americans are no better than any one else, but if they're *good Americans*, they're just as good, and a —— sight better than some.

Sort of mixed up, eh? But guess you can gather my meaning.

Well, that lets me out, so let's hear from the next candidate, and I hope he feels as thoroughly "done up" as I do after this effort. Yours for Camp-Fire—A. I. MacNamee.

SOMETHING about the Cossack Siech in connection with Harold Lamb's novelette in this issue:

A word about the *Siech*. It was the military encampment of the Cossacks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

HERE gathered the picked warriors who left their tribes and families for the wars. To escape annihilation by the Turks and Tatars, it was kept an open camp, moved constantly up and down the banks of the Dnieper, below the cataracts, its exact position being concealed. So the warriors came to be called Zaporoghians or "Men from Below the Rapids."

This brotherhood of the warrior Cossacks was a military democracy; the *koshevoi ataman* or camp commander exercised authority over the free Cossacks, but only in time of a campaign. In peace, which was seldom, they did as they pleased.

Every entrant turned over his personal property to the *ataman* of his barracks, to be used for the common good. A thief among the warriors was almost unheard of, and stealing was punished by imprisonment in the stocks. A cudgel was placed by the stocks and any Cossack was privileged to beat the criminal as he passed by.

LYING was rare, and resulted in severe punishment. Murder was taken care of by burying the murderer alive under the corpse of the victim. Women were barred from the *Siech* rigorously—possibly because it was desired to keep the situation of the war camp hidden.

The brief stay of the free Cossacks in the *Siech* was an orgy of drinking, feasting and gaming—as long as the spoil taken in the last expedition held out. But once on the march again a man found drunk was shot down. In any dispute the older Cossacks decided what was to be done.

For weapons, the free Cossacks were forced to rely on what they could take from the Moslems, who were the best armed troops in Europe at that time. No one received any pay. Often the barrack *atamans* buried some particularly rich treasure, intending to dig it up again when the regiment was broke or funds were needed. But, more often than not, the chronicles relate, they forgot about it, or were killed in battle.

When a free Cossack wished to go back to his village or family, his name was taken from the roll of the Zaporoghians.

SUCH was the brotherhood of the free Cossacks. Only two conditions were made to a newcomer; he must be able to use weapons, ride and take care of himself, and he must be a believer in God and Christ. Every new arrival was expected to perform some feat to show his worth. A good many died in attempting to shoot the cataracts of the Dnieper, or in jumping their horses over the palisade around the camp.

During the reign of Lenin and Trotsky in Petrograd recently, the Bolshevik party tried to win over the Cossacks, and, subsequently, to break their strength, but found the "Free People" just as much opposed to Bolshevism as to the old tyranny of the nobles.

For the opening verse of the song quoted in a former story, "The King Dies," and for the version of *Ivan Sirko's* letter as well as several points in this summary, the author of these tales is indebted to Capt. W. P. Cresson, whose history, "The Cossacks," is the only modern account of this adventurous people in English.—Harold Lamb.

THIS is an interesting little effort. Taken from a letter telling us how very, very bad was T. S. Stribling's serial, "Fombombo," and how it failed to present Venezuela right:

So I ask you on behalf of your readers who have confidence in you to suppress this story at any cost.

Speaking of cost, I even know of somebody who, if properly approached and handled, might defray not only this cost but be induced to subsidize a series of good stories actually reflecting things that exist in that country?

And later on, toward the close of the letter, this passage:

If you would like to talk it over, drop me a line and I will run up to town on whatever day you set and we will have lunch in some quiet corner of the —— Club.

Well, I haven't yet met him in that quiet corner of the —— Club. So far as I can see into the future I can't discern any chance of my meeting him anywhere. But it seems to me, though I didn't mention the point to him in my polite letter declining the opportunity offered, that I ought to follow our usual custom when anything concerning the general policy of our magazine is at issue and put the question up to all of you for decision.

If you didn't approve my decision, there would be no trouble about recalling my declination. And honesty forces me to confess that there are many strong points in favor of his plan. In this country's business and political affairs it has become quite the custom to sell anything you have for whatever money you can get. Surely if Congressmen, the heads of big business, labor organizers, Prohibition and immigration officials and such frequently sell what the sentimental idealist calls their souls, why should little folk like us hesitate to sell our

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less important souls? Why, we can get real money for them! What else matters?

BY SELLING ourselves and our magazine we could not only get some good hard cash, but, by a little judicious advertising of the fact that our fiction pages were for sale to the highest bidder, we could undoubtedly build up quite a fat little income on the side. This income of velvet would enable us to lower the price of the magazine and that would mean money in the pocket of every one of you.

And then we could subsidize our "Ask Adventure" service to land-promoters, railroads, business enterprises, etc., and get still more velvet. And I could subsidize my talks to Camp-Fire. Of course, having gone in for that kind of thing, it would be quite in keeping for the "AA" editors and me to gyp the rest of you by holding out on you, but that's just the usual chance people have to take in such matters.

ONE of the strongest points in favor of the above letter is that, once you've embarked in this sort of work, you are constantly getting experience and skill in the necessary methods and are less and less hampered by what the idealists call conscience. Having grafted a while, you naturally become a better grafter than you were before you learned the game. There's no limit to what can be done in this line. Even the politicians and big business men haven't yet learned to play the game for its full possibilities.

A Congressman, for example, who habitually and skilfully sells out his obligation to the people frequently can be trusted by his personal friends in private matters. A captain of industry who works his head off to ruin his country by letting down immigration bars to get cheaper labor and greater profits for himself, in most cases would not sell his wife's virtue even to his best friend. The Congressman and the captain of industry and all the others like them are neither consistent nor really efficient. Why let that idealist conscience thing interfere with being thorough? Why let it make them neglect the side lines from which a very respectable profit could be made? Honor? What have they to do with honor? The opinion of their fellows? It's already so low that a bit more won't matter, and anyhow it's an elementary precept of the grafting game to get yours without letting people know about it. Is it really any worse to steal from a personal friend than from the people who trusted you to serve them honestly? Is it so bad even? If it's all right to loose conditions upon your country that will eventually mean infinite human misery and debasement, why on earth stop over such a detail as one woman's honor. Why draw these idealist lines? Rotten public officials and rotten manipulators of big business, you're crooks,—you're crooked to your very core, grafters par excellence. Why make these fussy and idealist distinctions, prostituting yourselves and others in certain cases and loudly braying about your "honor" in other cases, holding yourselves "respectable" while you graft wholesale, and looking down on the thief in jail who merely grafted retail? Honor? *You* haven't any honor! Go steal from your friends and prostitute your wives and daughters. It won't make you much lower than you are.

So why should we keep our magazine clean if we can graft for it, and for you as its readers, a little real money? Is anything more valuable than money? It doesn't seem so sometimes when you look about you.

AND this dry-rot in our country's heart will grow and grow, sapping her strength, dragging her down to shame and weakness. Unless we awake to the need of putting into operation the one possible remedy—systematic, organized teaching, in school and home, of the elementary obligations of democratic citizenship, with heavy emphasis upon the facts that the betrayer of the people, whether in or out of office, is as much a traitor as Benedict Arnold and that the grafter is lower, weaker and more dangerous than the common criminal. We teach our children individual morals and are a fairly moral people individually. We fail utterly to teach them civic morals and as a people we stink with civic rottenness.

LEST somebody take seriously the idea of voting on whether our magazine shall be subsidized—I've had some twenty-odd years experience in finding how easy it is for an apparently plain thing to be misunderstood—I might mention that I haven't an idea any one of you would vote for subsidizing and that if this magazine is subsidized in any way it will have to be done without our knowing about it.—A. S. H.

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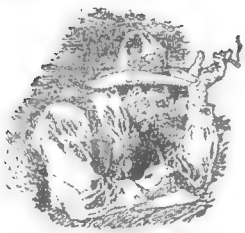
Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

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Timber of the Amazon

SUBSTITUTES for oak and white pine:

Question:—"I am in business here in the lumber line and am thinking of going down to Panama to engage in the industry there and would be very pleased to get some information relative to the classes of timber there and their marketability. I understand there is much mahogany there as well as woods which we know little about. I am particularly interested in the Darien district.

I should like to know about other forest products such as vegetable ivory, rubber, etc. I have sufficient capital to take care of any business venture I may make. Could you direct me to any literature that would help? Any information you may give

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me will be much appreciated."—R. A. BARRON, San Francisco, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Barbour:—Panama, at least the easily accesaible parts, has been pretty well lumbered over. The mahogany is either gone or is tied up by large operators. The same is true of the Spanish cedar. Cocobolo, used for knife handles, etc., is produced by primitive methods in western Panama. A bulletin on it has been issued by the Yale Forest School, which you would find very instructive.

There is also some lignum-vitæ in Panama, but the demand during the war used up most of the accessible supply.

Most of the forests in Panama are mixed, with valuable species mingled with others which at present have no market other than local.

Have you considered the Amazon? There is the greatest amount of timber, much of it accessible for river transportation. In my judgment too much stress has in the past been placed on woods from the tropics which I have heard characterized as "gold-nugget" species, that is to say, the valuable ones which are worth a lot per unit of measure, but whose market is limited. Cocobolo, rosewood, lignum-vitæ, etc., come in this category.

The tropical woods which in the long run are going to be the most valuable to exploit are the general-utility woods which can be used in this country as substitutes for American woods which are getting scarce. For example, in the Amazon Valley grows a white, soft wood called maruba, which makes an excellent substitute for the finest grades of white pine, and—on the New York market at least—can undersell white pine.

Another is frey jorge, called in Argentina potereby and also known as laurel. It somewhat resembles oak and is exceptionally straight-grained and nice to work. It makes very fine flooring, for instance, which can undersell American oak flooring.

Literature on tropical American woods is almost non-existent. What there is occurs as scattered short articles in various lumber-trade journals, and often is not accurate. Prof. S. J. Record, of the Yale Forest School, has completed recently a very valuable book called the "Timbers of Tropical America," but it has not yet been published. When it is is, it will fill a long-felt want.

You see, we have been so "flush" with timber in this country that we have been negligent of foreign supplies. Probably on the Pacific Coast you do not yet feel any signs of a timber famine, but here in New York we do. For instance, we import from the Pacific Coast through the Canal, over 5,000 miles. The mouth of the Amazon is not over half that far away.

The tropics can not in my opinion—and I have been over a good part of Latin America—ever supply us with cheap construction timber, such as yellow pine or Douglas fir. But it can and soon will have to send us substitutes for ash, oak, hickory, walnut, white pine, etc.

American capitalists are missing a good bet if they do not while land prices are still low pick up big acreages in the tropics, to be held for a while till the call comes. In a few years such tracts will be worth for the land alone as much as both land and timber sell for now. Three years ago I cruised 200,000 acres in northern Argentina, which was offered for about four dollars an acre. The land itself was worth that, for in addition to being very fertile it lay within ten miles of a railway. The timber was quebracho, which is very valuable because it contains about twenty-five per cent. of tannic acid.

It is a good idea to look before you leap. I suggest this: Go down to Panama and see conditions on the ground. Then take a Swayne & Hoyt boat from the Canal to Rio de Janeiro and investigate conditions in Brazil. It is a glorious trip, and you should be able to get hold of very valuable information.

The resources of the tropics have barely been scratched, and in the next generation fortunes are going to be made there as they were in our West in the past few generations.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

The Painted Desert

HOT! And dry!

Question:—"Please tell me what I am to take as I am going on a prospecting trip into the Painted Desert of Arizona. Name the different articles I am to take, and the cost of such a trip."—JOHN STEPHENSON, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Why don't you go prospecting in Harlem or The Bronx? You would get just as much gold as you would in the Painted Desert. That is not a mineralized section.

However, if you want to go there, of course you can do so.

I enclose a printed sheet giving a list of articles needed.

Have you any idea of what you propose to attempt? Do you know anything at all about the Painted Desert country?

I was there in June, and let me tell you what I saw. A plain that is a mile high in its lowest part, a mile and a half in some others. Fifty-three miles in one direction with only one house in sight. Seventy-odd miles in another before we saw a house. Then only an Indian village and school, in a great gash in the mesa, a gash more than three hundred yards wide and miles long and 500 feet deep.

An arm of the Painted Desert running into the plain from the west, just a sink forty to eighty feet below the plain, colored richly in umber, chocolate, gray, blue-gray, red and yellow. Bunch grass and grama grass all over the plain, hardly anything in sink.

Navaho, Apaches herding their sheep and friendly enough as long as they know you are just sightseeing, but bitterly ugly if they see you prospecting. They know that the discovery of gold means whites piling in by the thousands, and they object. There is gold in their country, but none has been found in the sink of the Painted Desert. It is all Navaho land, and they hate a prospector. Nine out of ten stop right there, too, if the Navaho catches them alone.

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There is another thing that you probably have not considered; and that is, what are you going to do for water on your trip? You would get lost as soon as you got out of sight of the road. You know none of the springs and water-holes.

Make a test before leaving New York. Pick a hot day, the hottest you can. Get up on a flat roof, not more than two or three stories up from the street. Take no water along. Stay there all day in the sun, without tasting any liquid. Then multiply your discomfort by ten, and you have a correct estimate of what a day of Arizona heat means when the canteen is empty.

Boy, it sucks the moisture out of you as you squeeze it out of a sponge. It took over twenty pounds off my weight in three weeks. It reduced one of my companions twenty-three pounds.

And I had water to drink, mind you.

In the air where you live the humidity is great. In this land you propose to prospect it runs about .03 of 1 per cent. in Summer. Do you know what that means? It means the drying quality of a bake-oven.

If you start out to prospect Arizona without a companion who knows the country and camping tricks, say a last farewell to your folks, if you have any. It is dollars to German marks that they will never see you again.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Wants to Swap Butterflies

THERE are some 50,000 species scattered over the globe, so there's no dearth of trading-material:

Question:—"I am interested in collecting butterflies, and I would like to know if you could tell me of some one in South Africa who would be willing to trade specimens of that country for American specimens."—H. D. WRIGHT, Washington, D. C.

Answer, by Capt. Franklin:—Through the auspices of *Adventure* I have had the pleasure of giving a correspondence introduction to readers of the magazine living in the United States, to residents in a number of remote districts in far-off South Africa.

This to my mind is something we should encourage. I am therefore writing to some personal friends of mine in South Africa, asking them to hustle around and find the people you want for the interchange of butterfly specimens. As of course you are very well aware, South Africa teems with the most interesting lepidoptera in the world.

I have also gone further than this and have sent letters to two personal friends of mine, one of the Zoological Gardens of Pretoria and one to an official of the Cape Town Museum, asking them to assist us in our quest.

It might be well to state that while *Adventure* can not allow itself to act as an "exchange and mart," we make every endeavor to place our correspondents in touch with parties who can give them the greatest benefit. This has always been our policy.

A Job in a Maine Lumber Camp

HARD work, but it will keep a man fit:

Question:—"I was thinking seriously of obtaining employment in a lumber camp or some such employment which would afford an abundance of fresh air and laborious work.

Inasmuch as I was discussing this matter with Mrs. ——, who remembers you pleasantly, she suggested that I write you knowing as she does your vast experience and knowledge and seeing that you are a department editor of *Adventure*.

Perhaps if I give you a brief outline of myself it may help you to suggest something. Twenty-five years of age, in good health. When I say good health it is meant that I am never sick or have occasion to visit a doctor, although I do know that my whole system is sluggish. My weight is one hundred and twenty-six pounds, and height seventy inches. This is what I am anxious to alter. As you see I am very thin and under weight, and I know you will agree with me that the only way to overcome this condition is to live and work in the open. I am athletic and capable of doing hard work.

Please omit name and address."

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—I have no doubt you could find a job of some kind in a Maine lumber camp if you were on the ground. Most operators in the lumber or pulp-wood business wish to see what a man looks like before they hire him, and they want men that will stick, and not throw up the job after a few days' trial. Some of the work is hard, and the "greenhorn" that is not accustomed to hard work gets discouraged before he gets toughened to it; but it's healthy work, and after the first few weeks is not so blamed hard.

I have a friend who has worked for years in a dental laboratory, and his health gave out; so he got a job as clerk in a lumber camp and left for the "bush" this morning. I think he will get about seventy-five dollars per month and board. I have an idea you might do as well.

You might hire in New York from some of the employment agents there. If I can be of assistance to you in securing the job I will gladly do it.

Game of Manchuria

DID you ever stop to think that your wife's—or your boss' wife's, or his boss' wife's—sables were probably trapped by a Chinaman?

Question:—"I wish to make a trip to Manchuria and northern China to do some hunting and trapping.

Is the country trapped out? Also would the Government of China or Japan object to my going there for that purpose?

Do these Governments offer any bounty on predatory animals?"—ROBERT E. CLARKE, Portland, Ore.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—Do not think that you would have any difficulty in hunting and trapping in Manchuria. The Siberian tiger, brown and black bear, wild boar, wolf, fox, wapiti or elk, otter, marten, muskrat, sable, skunk, squirrel and many

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varieties of deer are found in north Manchuria. The district around Sansing still produces the most sable; but Tsitsihar, Kirin and Ninguta also send furs to the market at Harbin.

Do not know of any restrictions imposed by the Chinese or Japanese Governments on hunting; nor do I know of any bounty paid on predatory animals.

You understand, of course, that you would have to compete with Chinese in this business; and they are in a better position to withstand the hardships common to their country than is a white man.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

The "Leopard Societies"

MURDER cults of Africa's west coast:

Question:—"Some time ago I noticed a syndicated article in the Sunday magazine section of the Denver *Post* regarding what was called a 'Leopard Society' in Liberia.

From this article I gather this society is a secret outfit, whose members (all blacks) dress in leopard skins, with talons made of iron, and their especial victims are girls. They have a pleasant habit of slashing the throat, tearing out the heart and scoring the back of the victim with four deep gashes, with the iron claws. They are also cannibals.

These people are also supposed to be in Sierra Leone, and as you cover this territory for *Adventure*, it occurred to me you might be able to give me some information about this society—particularly whether there really is such an outfit.

I understand certain articles have appeared in different geographical magazines, but I do not know the names of the publications nor the dates. If you know anything about this, I would appreciate your advising me, as well as any other pertinent information you may have about the Leopard men and how Liberia and the British Government are combating them.

If this is published, please do not print my name."— —— ——, Thatcher, Colo.

Answer, by Mr. Simpson:—The Denver *Post* article you refer to had an only too unhappy foundation in fact. West Africa generally is sown with secret societies, and the Leopard cult is by no means confined to Sierra Leone or Liberia. The leopard being the most ferocious and most courageous of West African jungle animals, it most naturally appeals to the native imagination as a worthy symbol of all that is savage and cunning and brave—thoroughly well able to tackle anything and everything it is likely to have to contend with. Consequently Leopard societies are to be found all along the West Coast, each one of them a little different in its make-up perhaps, but all of them, for the greater part, the most powerful in its particular district.

Although the "best people" of Sierra Leone and, I assume, Liberia and elsewhere, insist that the Leopard cult is now confined to the bushman of the *Hinterland*, the white Government officials have grave doubts about the matter. Thus when a particularly revolting murder or series of them happens along, the Leopards are generally believed to have had more than a little to do with it.

Every once in a while one of their "lairs" is uncovered and more or less destroyed, but wiping out a West African secret society is like trying to kill all of the white ants in an ant-hill. You think you've got 'em all, and the following morning or thereabout you know you haven't.

Naturally since the Leopard societies are secret societies, their inner workings are most carefully screened from the eye of the inquirer, be he white or black. But like the majority of secret societies, no matter where they are found, they have several "degrees" through which the members must pass before they are introduced finally to the "mysteries." Some of these degrees are more important and expensive than others, and the final degree is of course the most expensive, the most secret and the most difficult to attain, sometimes being confined only to the greatest among the chiefs.

It frequently happens too that the members of a certain degree will form an off-shoot society among themselves, independent of the "parent" society, thus multiplying the number of societies which have had their birth in the Leopard cult altogether beyond conjecture. P. Amaury Talbot, who had an opportunity to learn something about two of the best known Leopard societies, has this to say about the Sierra Leone branch:

"Members of this society can often be recognized at sight, as many of them have the sharply protruding forehead, caused by pressure applied in infancy by their mothers.

"When the society wishes to kill a man certain members are chosen for the deed. These are armed with a set of iron instruments fastened inside both hands, and they track their victim until they come upon him in a lonely part of the bush. They watch their opportunity, suddenly spring upon him from behind and seize him by the throat. Should the body ever be discovered, the marks upon it so exactly resemble those made by leopard claws that the death is put down to those beasts."

So that the claws are useful as well as emblematic! And it is evident that members of the Leopard society are brought up to it from infancy.

Down among the Ekoi people, on the borders of the Kameroons, Talbot found the Egbo (Leopard) Club the most flagrant institution in that part of the country. It was practically the only law there was before the white man took it over, and even after the British Government arrived no respectable Ekoi community, migrating from one location to another, would think of choosing a site for a new town without first deciding where the new Egbo clubhouse was going to be built. More than this, the clubhouse was built first, and the town grew up around it.

Apparently, according to Talbot's description in his colorful book "In the Shadow of the Bush" (Geo. H. Doran Company, New York, 1912) the Egbo society did not mind performing some of its initiation ceremonies and plays before his camera; but the Mariba ceremony, where the several mysteries were unveiled, was the mystery of mysteries, well illustrated by the following story:

"During the Mariba the sacred images, etc., are carried to a part of the bush where a little hut of green boughs has been built to receive them. Sentries are posted to keep all intruders from coming within a mile of this post.

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"On one occasion, however, two young girls, sisters, happened to have missed the patrol and trespassed unwittingly within the sacred precincts, probably in search of nuts or bush fruits, which abound everywhere. They were caught by the sentries, brought before the Egbo, condemned to death and hanged almost immediately.

"Their brother, who was a member of the highest grade of the society, was allowed as a great favor to be present at their death, and afterward to carry home the bodies to his family. Of redress in such a case there could be neither hope nor thought."

This, I think, is sufficient evidence of the Egbo's power before the coming of the Government; and if anything the Leopard societies of Sierra Leone and Liberia are more bloodthirsty. Around Warri and the Benin River district, while I was there, we were treated to occasional evidences of secret society "palaver" in the shape of sudden disappearances of both men and women who were never properly accounted for.

Every so often a body floated down-steam, but "nobody knew and nobody cared." Even if there were signs of violence on the body, there was no means of tracing these things to any very definite source. In those days if the Government hanged a man it was taking pot luck that he was the right one, so it was naturally just a little bit careful.

It was said, shortly after I arrived in Warri, that a white doctor who had vanished somewhere between Warri and Sapeli—a distance of twenty-eight miles by road—had been accounted for by the particular Leopard society operating in that section. This society had a cannibalistic trend, and it was common property, anent the white doctor's disappearance, that the Government officials found some finger-bones and a signet ring which were held to tell their own story.

We were allowed to fill in the details to suit ourselves. Personally, I preferred to swallow the story with a considerable pinch of salt, possibly because I had to go on living around there for a long time after that, and wanted to feel as comfortable as possible.

Of course the white Governments along the coast do everything in their power to combat the influence and the all too unhappy effects of these secret societies. But since the penalty a native informant suffers is the nastiest kind of death and since these societies have generation upon generation of tradition behind them, the white Government official's job is at best a kind of hit-and-miss business. He can just keep pegging at it, trusting largely to luck and mostly to time. And there are a considerable number of pest spots he hasn't even seen, although he may be passing some of them every day!

I believe, though I have not read the book, that T. J. Alldridge's "A Transformed Colony" (London, 1910) supplies interesting data on the Leopard and other secret societies of Sierra Leone.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

The Ozarks

LANDS whose possibilities seem to include everything from diamonds down —except fertility:

Question:—"Would you please give me the following information regarding the Ozark Mountain region of Missouri and Arkansas?

Is there public land that can be homesteaded in this district, and where must application be made?

Would this district be suitable for sheep, hog and chicken raising, and would it be possible to raise enough of a crop for feed?

Are fur-bearing animals plentiful?

What minerals are to be found?

If you wish to publish in *Adventure* please use initials only."—W. B. D., Akron, O.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—You can get the latest detailed information about land subject to homesteading in the Ozarks by writing United States Land Office, Little Rock, Ark.

All the land is ideal for sheep, hog, fruit, poultry, chicken and cattle raising, though it is not very fertile, being mostly rough hills. You can raise sufficient feed for all kinds of live stock, and you have grazing throughout most of the year at practically no expense.

Most of the small fur-bearers are found in Arkansas. The minerals are silver, zinc, iron, copper, clay for pottery and lead; also diamonds in one county.

How to Skin a Squirrel

ALSO a few tips on home tanning:

Question:—"I would like to know how I could skin a fox squirrel so that I could keep the hide and send it away to be tanned and made into a fur neckpiece for my wife. Please tell me where I can send them to have them tanned and made up in this way, and also any other information you think would be useful to me in this matter.

Please do not use my name in publishing this."—— ——, Delphos, O.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—You can skin fox squirrels "cased." That is, rip along back of hind legs from paw, past root of tail, to paw. Skin down on paw to finger-bones and cut off bones. Then work skin wrong side out over body of the squirrel, pulling over the forelegs, down to fingers and then cutting off paws. Care about the ears, eyes and lips of the head—use sharp knife and work very slowly, not to cut eyes or ears. Cut off ear cartilage close to ears; let taxidermist prepare rest.

To preserve the skin in cool to cold weather, merely stretch on a thin board wide enough and long enough to fill the skin. In warm weather you would better wash the skin in one-half pound salt, one-half pound alum, four ounces borax, two ounces saltpeter. This in a gallon of water.

Soak the skins a week, and they are tanned. Then wring and twist till dry and soft. If dry hard, rub in vaseline, castor oil or even cold cream.

In skinning tail, cut a small U-notch in a stick to fit over tail-bone, and after skinning hind legs and around back, fit U over tail-bone and draw carefully toward end of tail, working the tail off the bone. It will slip off, the last half.

Skins as tanned above can be worked up at home, any way you please. Must be preserved, Summers, like all furs, against moths. Try out above on a red squirrel or chipmunk or two, or even rat-skin or catskin, and see how easily done, if doubtful about using fox squirrels for experiment.

A. R. Harding, Columbus, Ohio, "Home Manufacture of Furs," good book for you. Tells all kinds, skinning, tanning, etc.

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Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

EVERY little while some friend of mine sends me another version of the "Sunday School Song." It's not of much value or interest, but it is a good example of the way in which a popular song will grow as it passes on from mouth to mouth. Just how many verses there really are no one can tell; they seem to be infinite in number. Probably every singer who can adds to the song as he passes it on. I print a few of the many which I have, choosing them from a large number of different copies in my possession. The chorus is always sung first.

The Sunday School Song

Chorus—Young folks, old folks, everybody come.
Come and join our Sunday school and have a lot of fun.
Please to check your chewing-gum and razors at the door,
And you'll hear such Bible stories as you never heard before.

Adam was the first man that ever was invented;
He lived all alone, and he never was contented.
They made him out of clay, and they hung him up to dry,
And that's the way they did in the days gone by.—*Cho.*

Along came Eve, and then there was a battle;
She climbed up a tree, and she shook down an apple.
She shook down two, and they both ate one,
And that's how it was that the trouble was begun.—*Cho.*

Adam was a gardener, and Eve she was his spouse;
They lost their job a-stealing fruit and went to keeping house.
All was fine and dandy, and was happy in the main
Until they had a baby boy and started raising Cain.—*Cho.*

Along came Noah, a-stumbling in the dark;
He found himself a hammer, and he built himself an ark.
All of his sons and the kids came in;
Then along came Mrs. Noah with the rolling-pin.—*Cho.*

Noah was a weather prophet, and he predicted rain.
Folks said they'd be darned if they'd be fooled again;
So they went off on a picnic and the rain began to fall,
But Noah he had his ark, and he wasn't wet at all.
—*Cho*

Esau was a farmer of wild and woolly make;
Daddy gave him half a farm and half to brother Jake.
When Esau found the title to his birthright was not clear
He sold it to his brother for a sandwich and a beer.
—*Cho.*

Samson was a strong man of the John L. Sullivan school;
He slew ten thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a mule,
But a lady named Delilah got him just chuck full of gin,
And they caught him there baldheaded, and the coppers ran him in.—*Cho.*

David was a shepherd boy, a homely little cuss;
Along came Goliath and tried to pick a fuss;
So David took a pebble, and with all his might and main
He chucked it at Goliath, and he busted in his brain.
—*Cho.*

Ahab had a lovely wife; her name was Jezebel;
While hanging out the clothes one day down off the roof she fell.
"Your wife has gone straight to the dogs" is what they told the king;
The king he said he'd never heard of such a dog-gone thing.—*Cho.*

Daniel was a naughty boy and wouldn't mind the king;
The king he said he wouldn't stand for any such a thing;
So he chucked him through a manhole to the lions' den beneath—
But Daniel was a dentist, and he pulled the lions' teeth.—*Cho.*

Jonah was a traveling man, so runs the Bible tale;
Booked a steerage passage on a trans-Atlantic whale.
The cooking and conveniences they were not of the best,
So Jonah pressed the button and the whale he did the rest.—*Cho.*

That's the way it is sung today. An old song of the black-face minstrels called "De History ob de World" has some verses in common, but is, in the main, a quite different thing as the verse quoted below will show. I copy it from an excellent collection of "Minstrel Songs" published by Oliver Ditson Company.

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Oh, lightning is a yellow gal; she libs up in de clouds;
And thunder he's a black man, for he can holler loud.
When he kisses lightning she dodges off in wonder,
Den he jumps and tears his trousers, and dat's
what makes de thunder.

SOME time ago a friend of mine asked me to get for him the rest of an old song, "'Way Out in Idaho," which his father used to sing. He remembered only the chorus, which went as follows:

"Yo-ho, Idaho!
We're coming, Idaho!
A four-horse team will soon be seen
'Way out in Idaho."

I have not been able yet to trace this particular song, but thanks to many contributors my collections of old songs of the plains is growing rapidly. Curiously enough, one of these songs has the same title as the one I am seeking, though otherwise it is entirely different. It came to me from Mrs. M. E. Newson, and is a version which her father, Mr. G. E. Elwood, learned in the late 80's. It has, I think, enough interest to warrant my reprinting it.

Come all ye jolly railroad men, a story I'll tell to you
Of the trials and the hardships of an honest railroad man
Who started out from Denver his fortune to make grow
Till he struck the Oregon Short Line
'Way out in Idaho.

I was walking round through Denver one luckless April day;
Gilpatrick's man, Kercher, came up to me and did say
He wanted lots of railroad men and wanted them to go
To finish the Oregon Short Line
'Way up in Idaho.

I laid him down five dollars like many another man
And started for the depot as happy as a clam.
When I got to Pocatello my troubles began to grow,
Lying out in the sage-brush
In hail, frost, and snow.

Cold, wet and hungry, with my blankets on my back,
I started for American Falls, and there I met "Fat Jack."
Says he to me: "You are a stranger. Perhaps your funds are low.
In yonder tent is my hotel,
The best in Idaho."

I followed my conductor into his hotel tent,
And for one hearty meal I paid him my last cent.
Fat Jack is always jolly; you always find him so;
It was the only square meal that I had
'Way out in Idaho.

I went to work next morning for a cranky cuss called Bill;
He gave me a ten-pound hammer for to pound upon a drill.
He said if I didn't like it I could take my clothes and go;
He'd keep my blankets for my board
'Way out in Idaho.

It filled my heart with pity as I started down the tracks
To see so many old bummers with their blankets on their backs.
They said the work was heavy, the grub they could not go
Around the dirty tables
'Way out in Idaho.

It is now I'm well and working. It is at O'Brien's camp,
And I think if I continue I will make a little stamp.
Then I'll go back to Denver and marry the girl I know,
And bid adieu to all the folks
In the place called Idaho.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

OCTOBER 30TH ISSUE

Besides the **new serial** and the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

NEMESIS — ***J. Allan Dunn***
Safe from the law, but——

ZUKOFF FITS A KEY — ***William Harper Dean***
Why the juror voted, "not guilty!"

CHECKMATE *An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali* — ***George E. Holt***
He cuts the veil of diplomacy with a knife.

OLD MISERY A Five-Part Story Conclusion — ***Hugh Pendexter***
"East is East——"

THE JUDGMENT O' GOD — ***Orville Leonard***
"Git!" the cowboys ordered the Mexicans. "An' don't ever come back."

THE SEVENTH MAN — ***William Byron Mowery***
Some one was guilty of murder.

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